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WHIRLWIND

RUPERT HUGHES

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THE WHIRLWIND

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THE WHIRLWIND

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

LOTHROP PUBLISHING COMPANY
BOSTON

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TO

THE NOBLEST MAN I'VE EVER KNOWN

FELIX TURNER HUGHES

MY FATHER

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THE WHIRLWIND

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FIRST BOOK

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THE WHIRLWIND

I.

THE sky was meditating rain. The earth was restless with waiting.

In a dry, leaf-choked little gutter at the side of the shiftless, dead-silent country road there rose a quiver of motion; tremulous leaves scurried in their beggarly rags of last year; they reeled in a mad dance, rising higher and higher in widening circles. With them rose handfuls of dust agitated with the same invisible awakening breath of joy. And now the tiny spiral forsakes its dingy birthplace; it moves swirling along the road, up the hill-slope. It gathers earnestness as it grows. Taller and taller it rises, swifter and wider is its swathe. When it has swept to the hilltop and beyond, it is a tall man, a towering giant of strength and energy, a beautiful, splendid power, though shaped only of the democratic air and every-day dust and shabby leaves. Many are these twisting columns that every storm whips up along the many highways of the world. As many are their destinies.

As this one thrilled its way along this road, it passed and bestirred the persons in an old-fangled

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carriage drawn by a team, of which the off horse was a splendid young stallion all dappled and gray. The other was a roan gelding.

The rutty road kept the carriage bumping, swerving, and banging exasperatingly at their heels, and dust was over their fetlocks and drab on their muzzles. The horses grew less and less meek as the wind freshened and the thunder thudded. Perhaps they realised that the rain brimming to the very edges of the busy clouds would change this desert of dust into an odious knee-deep paste still harder to flounder through.

At any rate, they grew more and more mutinous, and the black man who held them in check would have lashed them bitterly with his whip had it not been for the uneasy protest of the woman on the back seat.

The driver of the enslaved horses was himself a slave. The white woman owned him.

She was the mother of the morsel of shapeless lace-smothered pink that wailed and mewled against her round young bosom. The pretty boy who sat with the driver, and the tiny girl who sat next to the woman, erect in all the dignity of six years, and whose fat legs and turned-up toes did not reach the edge of the cushion — these two were children of a friend.

The negro was saying of the four-legged slaves:

"Them thah colts has been out to grass so long, Missy, they's — whoa, boys! — pow'ful obstreperous. They's got mo' 'ristocratic notions than a nigger what's been 'lowed free. Missy, I 'clar to goodness — handsomely, handsomely, you! — et

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would he'p that off hoss a torrible lot jest to rise a few little ridges on 'im — whoa, I say! — with this hyah whup."

"Dan, if you dare touch them again, — do you want to get yo'se'f whipped when we get home?"

"Don' worry, Missy, I ain't so hongry for a taste o' rawhide as all that — whoa, boy, what you skeered of? Whoa, I say. Ain't yo' got no manners, jumpin' an' r'arin' aroun' thetaway an' skeerin' yo' young Missy? Behave yo'seffs. Whoa!"

The anxious young mother noted a little ragged boy cowering in a niche of the rail-fence alongside the road. Out of the corner of her eye she saw him dart for the back of the carriage, and while the off horse reared and flung his head wrathfully, she knew by a quiver behind her that the boy had found a seat on the projecting springs. She smiled to think that the negro had been too much absorbed to see the stowaway. But farther along the road an alert and malicious urchin almost split his throat yelling shrilly:

"Whip behind, Mister; whip behind! Ya-a-ah!"

The negro slashed the back of the carriage with his long whip, and the end of the lash cut the stowaway's cheek. But the pain could not sting him into a cry.

The mistress simply said:

"Oh, let him alone, Dan; you've got quite enough to do with those hosses."

The carriage flew on its way, the boy behind clinging to it for dear life, nought of him visible through the cloud of dust but the lean fist he brandished at the young Informer, a fist whose feeble

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power had frequently dealt that Informer dire pain and fright and unmanly tears.

Now the road took a sharp dip into a deep hollow. The horses broke into a long and dangerous lope. The carriage struck a jagged stone and bounded into the air. There was a rattle of splintered wood. The carriage lurched forward on the very haunches of the horses, adding to their anger, wild terror. They got the bits in their teeth, and bolted, the ferocious gray stallion plunging, bucking, and snorting hysterically. At the foot of the hill he reared so high that it seemed he must fall back into the carriage. When he came down forward he had the outer tug over his back. It snapped like twine. The other he broke with one jump. He now whirled round by the head against the roan. The roan swerved.

In the twinkling of an eye the carriage went crashing on its side. The young mother, flinging out her left arm to protect her child, fell with her whole weight on her elbow. But her babe had been snatched from her arm by the six-year-old girlie, who lifted it in the air as she slid down upon the mother. The boy on the front seat was thrown into the spokes of the wheel. The negro, gripping his knee over the side, managed partially to keep his place.

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II.

AUTOMATICALLY, Dan had devoted all his great power to holding the horses. But they began to kick and leap, and the roan was veering inward. In a moment they would be trampling the helpless woman and the children, or, if they ran, would drag them to their death.

Inspiration seized the negro. Holding desperately hard on the lines with his right hand, he drove his left into his pocket; snatched out a big jack-knife; opened it with his teeth; drew the blade swiftly across the remaining tugs; and, with a yell, released the horses. And they clattered swiftly away and disappeared over the brow of the hill.

The negro muttered prayers of gratitude equally to "the good Lawd," and to the "lef' hind leg o' that thar rabbit shot in the graveya'd by moonlight." Then he set about investigating the wreckage.

It was not easy to pick the small boy from the wheel, but he was unbroken of bone. Dan took the shrieking baby from the arms of the silent six-year-old, and lifted her from the body of the mother, who lay in the grass, unconscious and dishevelled, but beautiful even in her disarray. The negro must tug and pull the heavy carriage to one side before he could disengage her.

A little brook that dwelt in that hollow furnished water to restore her, and she woke to find the faith-

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ful negro bathing her brows tenderly, and imploring her to come back to life. Before her white stillness he had felt a fear he had not known when the horses were threatening death. When she returned to life, he broke out in loud hosannas. At length she recovered enough to ask for her child. She laughed weakly to see that the vigour of its lungs was nowise gone. When she learned how the little girl had saved the child, she exclaimed:

"Lucy, you are a reg'lah heroine. You have the presence of mind of a great captain. I reckon I'm almost as proud of you as I am grateful to you." Lucy's great small eyes only looked afraid. She wanted to cry. Instinctively she denied herself the luxury.

As the young mother clasped her babe to her breast, she thought of that other boy, the stowaway. She asked after him, and he was searched for in vain under the carriage.

At last they made him out peering warily through the fence like a quail. Dan roared at him, "Oh, thah yo' are, yo' young limb. What yo' on the otheh side thet 'ar fence for?"

And the boy, looking anxiously up the hill, —

"I was skeert fur fear them wild hosses 'd come back agin."

The negro thundered, "What yo' s'pose they gwine come back fur? To eat us all up?"

And the lad weakly answered, as he batted his eyelids solemnly: "I dunno what they wouldn't do. They acted as if they was awful mad about somethin'."

The negro sniffed. "Well, they ain't a-comin'

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back, that's sho'. I d' know's I'm sorry, either. Good riddance of bad rubbish, I say."

"But," his mistress exclaimed, "we cyan't stay heah. How'll we evah get back to Kyunnel Darr's —"

"Say, boy, how many miles is to anywhurz?"

"Darrville's 'bout five mile thataway."

"I could nevah walk that far," wailed the mother. "Besides, it's goin' to rain pitchfo'ks ve'y soon. Isn't theh any ho'se neah hyah wheh I could wait while you go fetch anotheh team?"

The negro rubbed his head. "I d' know nothin' 'bout this hyah Northern country, Missy. Things like this makes me wisht yo'd neveh come a-visitin' up hyah at all. Say, boy, is they any house neah hyah, where my Missy could git shelteh foh a while?"

"Paw's haouse is only a little piece off," the boy confessed, timidly.

"Well, then, you jes' lead the way for Missy, and I'll go on up the road an' try to find somebody to ketch them hosses an' len' me anotheh contraption. This hyah car'ge ain't good for nothin' more'n toothpicks now."

He let down the rails and waited till his mistress and the children had passed through into the field; then he struck off up the road with the peculiar, many-jointed, shambling gait of his race.

The boy led his little troop across a meadow at a speed the woman found it hard to equal, carrying the baby and hindered by two children, who clung to her skirts as timidly as if they were going through Hop-o'-my-Thumb's wood.

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"What is yo' name, ma boy?" she asked, hoping to retard him by conversation, and only losing her own breath thereby.

"Jawn."

"John what?"

"Oh, jest Jawn."

"What is yo' fatheh's name?"

"I dunno. Ma calls him 'You James Mead' when she's mad."

"What does yo' fatheh do?"

"Nothin'."

"I mean what work does he do?"

"I knowed that's what you meant. Nothin'."

"What does he live on?"

"Whiskey, mostly."

A little later he said, "That's our haouse at the edge of them woods thar."

As the woman heard the description of the family she paused.

When she looked at the distant log hovel she fell back.

The boy showed through his rags at many a point. One of his eyes was black and blue. His bare feet were bruised and dirty. Through a large hole in the chaotic affair that served for his shirt, she saw the red welts of a whip on his back. That was plainly the house, and this was plainly the son, of a drunkard and a shiftless brute. The uncouth thunder seemed to foreshow the profanity of the drunken wretch. The lightning hinted at his blows.

She dared not trust her delicate self and her child in such an inhospitable place. She decided to go back and wait by the roadside.

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Then a random bullet of rain struck her hand. Another smote her cheek.

Sharply, with the clatter, with the roar, the swoop of a cavalry brigade, the storm broke into a charge.

Instinctively they all ran for the one visible shelter. The rain whipped them as with a cat-o'-nine-tails. It bent them over and stung them through their reeking clothing. They seemed to be wading a stream, so thickly the drops spattered back from the ground.

At length they made way to the cabin. A woman opened the door to them, and could hardly force it shut against the rainy wind that crowded in with them. They stood bedraggled in misery, and pools of water formed round their feet from their dripping clothes.

The woman who had let them in spent no time in words. She snatched the baby from the mother's grasp, tore off its sopping finery, rubbed it red with a towel, and, swaddling it in a blanket, laid it quickly on a cot to howl itself to sleep.

Then she said to the children:

"Here, you childern, git off them wet things this instant, and stand over by the fire. Jawn, you run git some of them extry blankets out o' the lower drawer o' the cupboard. You, Miss, you'll ketch yer death standin' there shiverin' like that. Take off every stitch you got on an' I'll find you somethin' of mine. It won't be as fine as them, but it'll save ye from lung-fever."

The woman paused in embarrassment. "Yo' are ve'y kyind, but where can I go to change?"

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Looking about she saw there was but one room to the hut. "May I go up in the — the — up-stairs?"

"Humph!" sniffed the woman. "I guess not. Jim's dead drunk and asleep up there. You undress right here. I'll lay a sheet across that chair and keep the childern lookin' in the fire, and I'll help 'em change. Nobody'll notice you at all."

In time, all the aristocrats were dry and warm, and plebeian in raiment that did not fit and did not pretend to.

After the first rush of tearing off the watery raiment, mopping the glistening skin and slipping into alien garments whose one virtue was their cozy dryness, the woman looked about her and made out the manner of place she was in.

Even the gloom of the storm and the blarney of the dim firelight could not make that home picturesque, or hide its stark and naked poverty. Huddled in a corner were three other children — the numerous hostages the poor seem always ready to offer their hard fortune, the mouths that take from the pauper the things he hath not. These children crowded timidly together, and blinked at the interlopers like young owls happened on in midday.

The boy that had ushered them into this cave of logs was the only one still wet and miserable. After a while of embarrassment the visitor asked:

"I reckon yo' boy ought to have something dry, too."

"Jawn? Oh!" his mother smiled, sadly, "he's used to it. Hain't ye, Jawn?"

"Um-hum," mumbled John, terrified at being the

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subject of talk. His mother went on, with the facile confidence of backwoods-folk.

"Many's the time pore little Jawn has hed to sleep aout in the woods all night." In answer to the stranger's look of surprise, she nodded her head upward to indicate the mysterious brute in the loft. "Jawn's father means well enough. When he's sober he's nice and sociable. Lazy folks always is. I wisht he would keep on bein' lazy when he's in liquor. But he's the most activous drunkard you ever see. Many's the time I haven't knowed whether I'd ever live through one of his sprees or not."

"Don't tell me!" exclaimed the young Southern woman, whose husband was more than ever the Chesterfield when he had followed too deeply the mint in his julep.

"Why don't you leave him?"

"Humph! where'd I go to? My folks is more'n a thousand miles from here — Noo Ham'shire. They've got troubles of their own, too."

The conversation was starving to death. Then Mrs. Mead began the inquisition which, in a primitive civilisation, takes the place of established social status, blue-books, and peerages.

"Where might you come from? Daown Saouth, I guess."

"Yes, we're from the So'th. Atlanta, Georgia" (pronounced "Jawja"). "I'm from Virginia, but ma little baby there was born while we were visiting in Alabama last June. So we named her Alabama June. Mah husband says we'll soon be as good as a geography and a calendar."

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"So you're from the Saouth. What might you be doin' up here?"

"We're visitin' at Mrs. Darr's. This is Mrs. Darr's little gyul, and her boy."

"Oh, is that little Lucy Darr? Why, of course! Didn't know you in the dark, Lucy. How's your Maw? Are you a relation of the Darrs?"

"No. You see Mrs. Darr's husband went to West Point with my husband. They're both down in Mexico now."

"So your man's daown there fightin' the Greasers, too? Colonel Darr tried to git my old man to 'list, but he's too lazy to tote a musket. So you're visitin' Colonel Darr. Humph! The Darrses is great folks round here. Jim used to work for the Colonel. But he was too onreliable, Jim was. One day the Colonel kicked him off the place. Jim said it was a mean advantage to take of him when he was drunk, and went round next day an' insisted on fightin' when he was sober. The Colonel knows all the fancy ways o' boxin', though, an' Jim he jest goes in head down an' arms licketty-split like a windmill. The Colonel laid him out worse'n ever. So Jim come home an' took it out of my hide. He can usually lick me. I do Mrs. Darr's warshin' sometimes."

"Indeed?" was all the Southern woman could say. And it had a pathetically unfit, drawing-room sound.

After another pause Mrs. Mead resumed the cross examination.

"How long might you be staying in these parts?"

"Till the war's over, I reckon."

"That won't be long, most likely. Them Mexi-

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cans hain't won a single scrimmage yet. An' they fight pretty hard, too, — leastwise the first part of the battle. Jim says they hain't got no stayin' powers. I tell him he's got a heap o' stayin' power with the bottle."

She laughed mournfully at the family joke. The Southern woman, used to weighing fine points of consideration for others, hardly knew whether perfect courtesy demanded that she should smile or look sad.

"So you're a-visitin' Colonel Darr's folks? An' your husband is an officer, too? A reg'lar West Pointer. What might his — er, his position be?"

"Oh, he's a kyunnel, too."

"Humph! Jes' so. Perhaps I've heard of him; what might his name be?"

At last the momentous question was out.

"Oh, pa'don my not mentioning it; he is Kyunnel Henry Muir."

"You don't say so! I want to know! He's the feller that led that charge up Popocaterpillar, or some such place they're all talking about, ain't he?"

His wife blushed with pride, and nodded her pretty head.

The boy broke in, hoarse with earnestness.

"Say, Maw, what's a battle like, anyway? Is it anythin' like this here storm? I wonder if them big guns sound like that there thunder?"

The mother giggled. "Jawn's a tur'ble sojer, he is. Always pretendin' them trees is Mexicans, an' he's fightin' 'em single-handed. He usually licks 'em, too; don't you, Jawn?"

"Well, you see, they ain't real soldiers. They

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cain't run either way. It's easy to whip 'em. 'Sides, I'm an American, I am. An' one 'Merican could lick all the rest of the world put together, — couldn't he, Maw? — if he jest had to."

"I don't *know* ez he could, an' I d' know *ez* he could. Up to now, I b'lieve, we've managed to hold our own."

"Gee! but I hope they'll be a war when I git growed up! I'll bet I'd show 'em how Yankees kin fight. Humph! You bet! Let 'em come on!"

"But s'posin'," his mother asked, to draw him out, winking at Mrs. Muir as she quizzed the boy, "s'posin' you wuz to have to fight other Americans. S'posin' they wuz a war between the North an' the Saouth over slavery, like what your Paw says is goin' to come sooner or later. What abaout thet?"

"Humph!" — and he paused a while, then said, solemnly, "I'd ruther fight somebuddy else 'sides 'Mericans."

Mrs. Mead turned to her guest.

"What might you opine on this tarrible subjick of slavery, Mrs. Muir?"

"Well, I ha'dly know what to say, Mrs. Mead — you've been so ve'y kyind to us all. But yo' see my bringin' up is all South'n. My father an' my husband are slave-ownehs. We couldn't work ouah plantations without niggehs — "

"Oh, I forgot. You must s'cuse me fer bein' so rude."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Mead, I beg of you."

The rain that had been swishing and rattling on the thatched roof had now died out to the gentle thrumming of one who mused. The thunder that

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had cannonaded the air had now but the subdued roar of a distant sea. The lightning no longer ripped the black sky with fierce white flashes; it had the faint, occasional flare of an expiring lamp, and seemed to have lost partnership with the thunder that had crashed almost in unison with it about the cabin seemingly doomed. The talk of the women grew more cheery and vibrant as they sat before the fire, Mrs. Muir on the only chair, Mrs. Mead on a soap-box, the children on the floor.

Mrs. Muir was recovering her spirits from the oppressive fear of the storm.

Now her blood was frozen by a loud roar from the loft.

"Hay, you! Who's making that all-fired racket down there? If I hear another sound I'll break your fool heads for you."

Mrs. Muir, looking quickly round in fright, saw almost over her, the tousled hair and drink-distorted features of a scowling giant of thirty.

Mrs. Mead responded with a brusque, "Aw, shut up an' go back to sleep, Jim, we've got comp'ny daown here."

"Oh, you have, eh? Well, turn 'em out! I won't have a pack of cacklin' hens comin' gossipin' round here." He fairly yelled, "Get out, I say, an' be spry about it."

Mrs. Muir was in a panic of a terror, but Mrs. Mead answered back, defiantly, "Aw, go back and finish off yer sleep. You're drunk as a fool."

"I am, am I? Well, we'll just see about that. I guess I'm sober enough to run m' own house. If

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that woman won't git out peaceable, I'll come down and throw her out."

Mrs. Muir was tremblingly whispering to the two Darr children to follow her, and groping for her baby. Then she saw the hulking brute begin the descent of the ladder. It quivered under his weight, and he missed his footing once or twice, which infuriated him further. When he reached the ground, he was insane with rage.

Mrs. Mead, to whom such scenes were almost a daily affair, yet felt bitterly humiliated before her guest. She seized the rolling-pin that had served her in good stead many a time, and stood on the defensive in front of the strangers.

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III.

IT never occurred to Mrs. Mead — or to any in that household ever — to try the soft word of diplomacy.

Mrs. Mead cried, "Jim, if you dare lay a finger on this here lady, I'll knock you senseless."

"Oh, you will, eh?" he sneered, and stalked toward her. He took the blow she aimed at him, on his arm, and then seizing her by the throat, began to beat her head against the rough logs of the wall. Her gurgling, throttled screams and his drunken oaths did not soften the situation.

Now the eldest son of this happy family, little John, dashed into the scene. He had placed a poker in the fire as soon as he had heard his father's voice above. Through all the parley and the beginning of the struggle he had watched with keen little eyes the slow reddening of the iron. Trembling with impatience and fear, he had waited till it glowed dully. Then he seized it and, rushing at his father, tugged at his sleeve with his left hand and screamed, "Paw, ef you don't leave Maw go this minute, I'll jab this here red-hot poker into you!"

The father simply flung the limp form of his wife to the floor, where she lay motionless; with a snarl he turned quickly on Jack-the-Giant-Killer and let drive at him one heavily booted foot. It doubled up the lean little wretch and sent him hurtling into a

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corner. The poker fell to the floor and hissed out its danger in a pool of rain.

The other children of the family had fled to the woods with practised speed. Seeing the door ajar, Mrs. Muir found strength to hurry Lucy and the little boy out, and to follow with her baby in her arms. Across the muddy meadow she stumbled, expecting every moment to hear the tread of Jim Mead in pursuit.

But the log cabin was as silent as a cemetery now, and she made her way safely back to the road, where she found only the wrecked carriage gleaming in the rain. Here her strength gave out, and she could not go farther.

After a long agony of suspense, she saw at the top of the hill a strange team of horses drawing an old Rockaway carriage — well called, then, a "dugout."

She recognised with joy that Dan was the driver. At first, he did not know her in her fantastic garb, but it needed only her cry of relief to make her known to him. He got quickly down, saying:

"These hyah hosses wouldn't run ef you wuz to whup 'em to mincemeat." Then he tossed the children to their places and supported his mistress carefully to hers, resumed his seat, turned the dug-out around with some difficulty in the rough road, and was just driving away, when he heard a shrill voice crying:

"Hay, Mister! hay, you!"

He reined in his horses. There again was the face of Jawn peering at him through the rails. He was paler now, his voice was weaker, and his breath

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was panting, but he managed to gasp: "Maw jest come to long enough to tell me to run an' tell you she'll send yer clo'es to you soon as she kin dry 'em an' iron 'em nice."

Mrs. Muir thanked him, then asked:

"But wheah is yo' — yo' — fatheh now?"

"Oh, he went up to the lof' agin, an' is sleepin' beautiful." Seeing the anguish of sympathy in Mrs. Muir's face, he added, quickly, "Oh, don't you worrit yourself about us. We're used to Paw."

Then Dan drove away and Mrs. Muir sighed deeply: "Po' boy, po' boy! what chance has he in the world with such bringin'-up, such home-life? Why are such children brought into the world?"

"But wasn't he brave, though?" was the comment of the six-year-old Lucy. "And he wants to be a soldier when he is big!"

Lucy had been all the afternoon devouring the ragamuffin with complete admiration that saw no rags on his soul. She had seen him trounce the Informer, Peter Platt by name, on one occasion when the Informer, whose father was a well-to-do farmer, had said to him, scornfully:

"Who's your mother? She ain't nothin' but a common worsherwoman, an' my father says your father's the county drunkard. Yaah!"

To little Lucy Darr little John Mead was a coming man. He had told her himself that he was going to be President of the United States some day.

And he had a way of knowing things, or of forcing his prophecies to come true, even when events seemed determined to warp them out of shape. If he said he could climb any of the trees on her father's place, he kept at it till he could. And did.

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IV.

THE brilliant sun that apologised next day for the horse-play of the rain, soon dried the fine feathers left at the Mead log cabin by the storm-bound birds-of-passage. John's mother washed the mud from textiles which, crumpled as they were, had a manner and look of aristocracy.

As she bent over the tub, and plunged her strong, yet gnarlless, forearms into the creamy soap-foam; as later she wrung out the clothes, her muscles playing gracefully under the well-woven fabric of her skin; as she entered the hospitable welcoming sunlight and stretched upward in long sweeping lines to pin the garments on the rope, she seemed so strong and well-made and hale a young animal, that there clung about her none of the pathos of her rugged life, with its poverty of comforts and its wealth of self-denials. She was in and of the sunlight.

She hummed as she moved busily about — a trivial little song as naïve, foolish, and warm as a sun-ray.

"Dere was an old nigger, his name was Uncle Ned,
He's dead long ago, long ago.
He had no wool on de top of his head,
De place whar de wool ought to grow.

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"*Den lay down de shubble and de hoe — oh, oh, oh,*
Hang up de fiddle and de bow,
No more hard work for poor Old Ned,
He is gone whar de good niggers go.

"His fingers were long like de cane in de brake,
He had no eyes for to see.
He had no teeth for to eat de corn cake,
So he had to let de corn cake be.

"When Old Ned die, massa take it mighty bad,
De tears ran down like de rain;
Old missus turn pale and she looked berry sad,
Kase she nebber see Old Ned again.

"*Den lay down de shubble and de hoe — oh, oh, oh,*
Hang up de fiddle and de bow,
No more hard work for poor Old Ned,
He is gone whar de good niggers go."

The song was new then — a year old only, and its words and music had come from a twenty-year youth named Stephen C. Foster. It was just the mixture of vague humour, vague pathos, and unexplainable quaintness that gave the song and its maker instant and eternal vogue with America. And in that spirit of half-saddened contentment and sunshot pathos Mrs. Mead sang it as she toiled.

The American painters who were then (as they still are) floundering on the stilts of allegorical and literary painting, and wasting themselves on the peasants of Italy, Brittany, Holland, — anywhere but home, — might well have studied the glad and gladdening graces of this young mother, her poses, her planes and contours, the character, the moods,

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the shifty manœuvres of the sunlight and shadow about her. Even to the boy John, who had little or nothing of the artist in his make-up, because he could not see, and did not care to analyse, the elements of the constant pictures she made, this young mother was the most beautiful being on earth.

He watched her always, noting dimly her grace of form and motion, the brown of her forearms and hands, the red-tinged russet of her cheeks, the snow-white of her throat and bosom. But her sturdy beauties were all refined and made delicate by the fleece-clouds of his imagination. She was his best friend, yet also something sacred.

When she tried to explain to him her religious creed, she could only make him understand her meaning by expressing God in terms of herself, her own kindness, her own love and sleepless care, her own sorrow over his mischiefs. The Deity that did not sleep and did no wrong was never a man and a father. Fathers, thanks to Jim Mead, did not stand in very good odour in John's mind; they were brutal, lazy, sleepy, and their breaths, where rank tobacco married crude whiskey, were not in good odour either.

To John, the Deity was somehow the mother, whom he drowsily felt tucking his blanket about him in the mid-dark of the coldest nights, whose kisses on his tear-stained cheeks half waked him from his dreams, half made them sweeter, more true.

One night, years ago, after an hour of the fireside theology she had tried to make plain to him, he had gone to bed suffering the usual bewildered after-effect of sermons. But, in the morning, all seemed

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clear as the dawn; the multitude of divine attributes were summed up in one being as the one round sun expressed all the little stars. He laughed with delight as he planned to show his mother how well he understood at last what she had been at such pains to tell him. When she appeared, he cried out to her with all the chivalric gallantry of his soul:

"Good morning, God!"

After her first amazement, she had toiled harder than ever to make plain to him what was not plain to herself; but she never could lift from his mind the feeling of her sacredness. This ineffaceable idea was always thereafter as much of a moving spirit in him, as it was an aid, a compulsion, a guidance to her.

So, to-day, he watched her reverently — with the genial, familiar reverence of the American nature. After the labour of washing out the clothes of the aristocrats, the mother and her boy chatted over other tasks while that old peasant, the sun, wrought upon the wet garments until they were dry and crisp.

Then the mother took them down from the line, lifted an iron from the stove, touched it with a moistened finger till it hissed as she wished it; then bent over the board and sent the iron gliding.

The pleasantest of all the tasks connected with refurbishing the affairs of the world, is the ironing thereof. Things will get soiled with use till they can no longer be used. Then must follow the lowly necessary tasks of those who make cleansing soaps from filth and refuse, of those who pound and scrub and rinse and wring and tote out to dry. Last of all, the fabrics come, shapeless and limp and wrink-

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led, though clean, to be ironed. And now a woman leans above them with cheeks flushed and brow dewy, and sends the hot heavy metal sliding over them till they are all smooth, and curled, glistening, polished like new.

Those who wash things, are the reformers; those who iron them, the poets.

As John's mother bent over her graceful, cheering task, he told her more of Lucy than ever before.

"Loocy an' me's chums, Maw," he said. "She useter like Peter Platt better'n me, till one day he said you was only a worsherwoman, an' I licked the stuffin' out of him, an' Loocy said I was right, an' she said I was full of spunk, an' he was a cowardy-calf because he was bigger'n me, an' picked on a feller what wasn't his size an' got walloped, too, fer his pains. So Loocy said I could be her beau, an' we're goin' to git married when I git growed up, an' you can come an' live with us an' never have to work no more 'cept fancy crochetin' like what her Maw does. She's allers workin' motters an' things, like 'God bless our home,' an' 'Love one another,' an' I told Loocy I was goin' to be President of the Uninted States, an' you kin come an' live with us in the White Haouse at Wash'n'ton, an' — say, Maw, ladies what lives up to the White Haouse don't have to take in washin', do they?"

His mother purred and laughed over her son's devotion and even more over his ambition.

"I don't s'pose as how they do," John went on, solemnly. "'Sides, I'll be so rich then, I can 'ford to have somebuddy do your washin' for you."

At last, when Mrs. Muir's dress was all finished

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into a masterwork of frills and tucks and lace and ribbons, after the florid fashion of that time, John's mother could not resist the temptation to deck herself out in the white opulence before she sent it back. The guinea fowl would see how it felt to be a peacock.

She disappeared into the loft, and John, waiting below, heard her tittering like a schoolgirl. When she came down the ladder she had a schoolgirl's blush and embarrassment. She strutted and pirouetted and attitudinised, and looked down and back over her shoulder as Euripides' Princess in the robe that Medea sent her.

John gazed in absolute rapture, crying, "Oh, Maw, you're jest plumb beautiful — you jest are. You're like one of them angels in the Darrs's Bible. Jest you wait till I git growed up. Umph! Won't I buy you nice things! You won't wear them old duds no more, you bet. You'll wear Sunday clo'es on week-days then. Umph! You're a reg'lar angel, Maw. I'll git you one of them harps, too. Or would you rather have a pianner? Jest you wait!"

Before the Cinderella masquerade was over, John's father came stalking in. He was sober, and repentant — not of being drunk before, but of being sober now. He had not yet drifted back even into his usual amiable laziness. He was surly, doubly surly because he was both thirsty and hungry. He looked on his wife's return to girlhood with a lowering eye.

"The sooner you git them fool rags off you and git me somethin' to eat, the less trouble they'll be round here."

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His wife danced up to him, and with a quaint attempt at a curtsey, answered:

"When yer Honour brings home somethin' to eat, I'll cook it. There ain't enough corn-meal in the house to make a Johnny-cake. You might go gun up a rabbit, er a prairie chicken, er a quail."

He seized his gun and flung out of the hut. John and his mother felt that his absence even with hunger was preferable to his intrusion upon their dreams of a future. For the future alone proffered them interest or comfort.

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V.

THE ancient Roman public stood meekly by the projecting rostrum — shaped like, and named from, the bow of a ship — to snap up what information the parental rulers and orators saw fit to begrudge. Was there not something of a likeness to those old schools, in the home life on the frontiers of American civilisation? There, in the gloaming of rough log-tents, the tired mothers sat with their knees thrust out like prows of ships while the new generation stood by to learn from the book spread out on the lap, the dark mysteries of A, B, C, and of 2 plus 2.

It was alongside such a rostrum that little John Mead was coaxed and coerced, kissed and cuffed into that high state of discrimination where his eye could tell apart those troublesome twins *c* and *e*, *n* and *u*, and *b* and *d*; where he could make the members of the alphabet march up and down with the exact precedence of a king's coronation; where he could put the numerals through the battle-manœuvres of the multiplication table like a young Napoleon. It was at his mother's knee that he found out the druidic secrets that give one the power of wresting from a series of meaningless lines and silly curves such a vital question as this: "Is the cat on the mat?" and of unearthing the triumphant answer, "Yes, the cat is on the mat."

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John had not taken to literature with the glee that sends an intrepid ducklet cheerfully out upon the first puddle. He had thought that reading was only a fine art, a uselessness, an affectation.

Till one important day.

He had found a sequestered little brook-nook where he had instinctively divined the presence of fish. He could almost smell and hear them in the depths. He leaned comfortably against a post carrying a sign-board whose legend might have been Sanskrit or something in cuneiform characters for all it conveyed to him. He cast into the water an earthworm fat as an alderman, but smuggling, in its inner self, the sharp hook of a bent pin. With this and his twine string and hickory limb pole he had kidnapped several beautiful young brook trout, all very healthy save for a touch of nostalgia. In his thoughts they were already making music as they sizzled in his mother's frying-pan. Then one of his ears felt a noise as of thunder and the blow of a great flat palm.

So soundly was he boxed that he forthwith went headforemost among the few remaining trout in the pool. He was drawn out, like Achilles, by the left heel. Then he was stood up on his proper end, and pulled round by the handle of one ear to confront an irate farmer who, as he had learned only too well, wore copper-toed boots.

"Whadjer mean by fishin' year, you dog-on little limb o' Satan?"

"Please, Mr. Rumford," the boy whimpered, "I didn' know you keered if I fished here."

"Oh, you didn't, hey? Well, what abaout that

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there sign-board?" And he gave the boy's ear a twist that sent his look up to the sign, though the pain blinded his eyes with tears, squeezed out of them as juice from a lemon peel.

"But please, Mister, I can't read."

"What? A big, hulkin' cub like you can't read? Well, I'll learn you what that sign says. It says *N-o*, no, *f-i-s-h*, fish, *i-n*, in, no fishin', *a-* a, no fishin' a, *l-o-u-d*, lowed, no fishin' allowed, *h-e-a-r*, year. No FISHIN' ALOUD YEAR. That's what that sign says. Now I'd advise you go home and learn to read. But anyway, I'd 'vise you to rec'lect what that there particular sign says. Now git."

John got. Mr. Rumford assisted him. As I have said, he wore copper-toed boots.

Thus John came to realise the great safety, the great beauty, the great power that exists in literature. For a day or two it was more comfortable standing by his mother's knee than sitting down anywhere, or running about at his usual games. These few days of application helped him over the most stupid arbitrary part of the symbols of our written language. He was soon able to gather letters into words, and eventually words into phrases; these into sentences; and finally sentences into ideas that unfolded like the piebald morning glories on the log cabin, blaring from their little trumpets their silent fanfares of perfume-reveille to the dawn.

Day after day John tagged at his mother's heels like her own skirts, demanding from morning till night:

"Maw, what does *p-i-g* spell? What is a *n-a-g?*"

He even asked her that dumfounding question

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with which Horne Tooke once floored a famous arguer: "What does '*is*' mean?"

In time John learned to read alone without harrowing his mother's soul incessantly, and he gained unspeakable joy from lying out in the great cathedral of the woods and finding in a small torn primer a strange sibyl, a little foster mother that could tell him such marvellous stories as only Webster's Primer knew.

He chiefly revelled in that parable in which the naughty boy caught stealing the apples, defied the soft pleading of the proprietor; then laughed at the grass the silly man threw at him, but grew quickly meek when sticks and stones were used as arguments.

The library at the Mead's was small and not select; few but not fit: a Bible in very small print; a Webster's Primer in very large print; such newspapers as had come round occasional parcels; and an almanac or two very much out of date. But even from such a library this Robinson Crusoe, marooned on an island barren of culture, found entertainment untold.

While the tears that flowed often from hunger unappeased were drying, he sought food in his books; while he was an exile in the woods from his father's drunken wrath, he found companionry in the adventures of good boy and bad; while the pains of the frequent whippings his father dealt him were subsiding, he took balm and arnica from some rich prose from the almanac.

By and by, John's ambition grew through the few books of his home and burst them out at elbows as

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his growing frame pushed through his ragged clothes.

His mother wished to send him to the school that was about to open. His father was one of those almost extinct dodoes, an American that cannot read. He was a conservative, and opposed to the policy of Forward.

"I ain't never had no book-learnin' an' I git along all right," he growled; "you'll go and git that good-fer-nothin' lout sich high-sprung notions his head'll swell so's nobody can't live with him; let him work an' pay his board-an'-keep, 'stead of lazin' away up to the schoolhouse."

His mother took up that dangerous weapon, the *argumentum ad hominem.*

"Yes, you ain't never had no book-learnin', you ain't — an' jest look at you!"

She thought this would bring on a fight.

It did.

She slept on the floor that night, too weak to climb to her bed. When his father was asleep aloft, John rose stealthily, and tried to get her to take his bed. When she refused, he brought his own blanket and spread it carefully over her, put his pillow under her head and kissed her tenderly. Then he tiptoed, and shivered out the night on his own bare cot.

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VI.

THE next morning the mother woke with bones aching and joints irresponsible. But there was no rheumatism in her resolve that her son should go to school. She began again:

"We'd better leave the boys a bit of ejication, Jim. Lord knows it's the only prop'ty they'll ever git to remember us by."

Her husband had neither violence nor patience enough to withstand her endless nagging. At last he consented with that bad grace which makes every gift seem rather an unkindness than a benefit.

To school the boy should go. To school he went. No old-time knight being rivetted up for a tourney could have been more carefully scoured, or polished shinier. It needed rising betimes and starting early to get the boy over the long, many-mile walk to the schoolhouse, which seemed hardly worth the walk when you got to it.

It was only a sort of woodshed in a lonely spot where no respectable woodshed would be set. It was placed with fine accuracy at a point ensuring the greatest possible distance from the homes of the greatest possible number. The education it proffered was slight, and was presented in the most difficult and least attractive way by persons as a rule eminently unfit.

But John Mead's ambition and hope superim-

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posed on the little pine schoolhouse the sun-washed minarets of Mecca. He hurried along the dreary roads, leaving a smoke of dust behind him; he trudged through the dense deep woods; he clambered over fences and ditches to take every short cut, whatever agony his bare feet were threatened by the heavy stubble in the fields.

In time he met other children loitering on their way or staining their well-scrubbed faces with the brine of reluctance.

He would not linger for their games, their raillery, or their company. He even refused one or two invitations to fight, lest he harm the glory of the toilet his mother had made him. He actually hurried past Lucy Darr, radiant in a new hood, cloak, and shoes, and tugging her small brother unwillingly to school.

"Where are you goin' so fast, Mister?" she sang out to him, with the coquetry of a wren.

"To school! and I'm afraid I'll be late. Maw said I must surely be on time," he called back, hardly turning his head. For ambition was his first love; little Lucy Darr a more recent flame.

At length he saw the schoolhouse brooding on top of the hill like a small brown hen. In the distance the noise of the cracked bell was not unlike a cackle. To John Mead the schoolhouse was fairer than the White House or the Capitol — he had them rather mixed in his mind.

Never did gold leaf surround a fairer picture than that framed by the cabin door when young Mrs. Mead had leaned against the casement to watch her boy over the hills to the dream-world. When the

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hill hid him at last, she turned back to her work, too profoundly happy to sing. She tiptoed about, fearing the least noise that might wake her from her reverie. For her other children, loved as they were, she planned the humble occupations of mail-wagon driver, grocer, and the like; the girls were to hope to marry farmers who would not work them to death before they were forty.

But John — he was of heroic stuff. She felt that he had a destiny. She did not know what it would be. The estates of a prosperous village tradesman, a general, a State governor, or a United States President were about all she could think of. She knew John would be something great.

To be great one must leave the home-nest, soar high, and fly far. She hoped that John would not forget her when he was so great and distant. Perhaps he would send her a camel's-hair shawl from the city; he might even write for her to come and visit him. At any rate she would have started him on the path. She went back to the door and stood there looking out into hope.

She was wiping a great round milkpan dry. The pan fell with a sudden clamour. On the hill-rim she saw her boy returning, not with wisdom and wealth and fame, but in dejection and his usual rags.

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VII.

SHE hurried out to meet him, calling from afar.

"What's the matter, Johnnie, sweetheart? What ye home so soon fer?"

He swallowed lumps of nothing with much difficulty many times, before he could gasp:

"You gotter have school-books up to the school, an' — an' — they cost money."

Money! actual, material money! that was something almost unheard of in the Mead family, glad to exchange labour for produce, and find its capital in brawn and barter. When money came their way it was not meant for books — books of all things in the world!

At this new blow, all her hopes fell crashing about Mrs. Mead's head.

Our dreams fling out on the wind the cables of their long suspension-bridges as lightly as gossamer spiders, theirs. But when they fall, these dream-bridges, they bruise and maim the heart as if they were girders of steel.

John Mead longed to give way and cry like a child, but his mother was already weeping bitterly. In comforting her he found strength. At last he said:

"The teacher said we had to have books, and that he had some to sell to them as hadn't any, an' they would come to a dollar an' a half, but he had

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some second-handers he could let us have fer six bits. Six bits! When he said that, I seen it wasn't no use fer me to stay no longer. I sneaked out of the door so's nobody'd notice that I couldn't 'ford the six bits. But Lucy Darr was a-watchin' me, an' she come runnin' after me. The teacher hollered at her to set down, but she come anyway; an' she said she s'posed as I didn't have no books yet, an' she'd be glad if I'd study with her'n till I got ready to git mine. Just's if I'd ever have six bits to my name! 'N' 'en I said, 'Don't choo know that boys has to set on one side the school an' girls on the other'n?' An' she said she hadn't thought o' that. So I said, 'Thank ye very kindly all the same, Loocy,' and started for home.

"But she ketched up with me again, and said, 'Say, John,' she says, 'I got more'n a dollar,' says she, 'in my savin's-bank,' says she, 'an' you're welcome to that,' she says. That hurt my feelin's turrible, an' I said, ''Z if a man'd take money from a girl!' an' I started off again. But she ketched holt of me oncet more, an' said, 'I'll loan it to you, then,' she says. But I says, 'You'd never git it back, Loocy. It'd be just common stealin' for me to take it.' An' I broke looset an' come home. Loocy's a terrible nice girl, but — oh, Maw, Maw! 'll we always be as pore as this? Seems as if I'd give the whole world an' all the stars fer six bits to git them there books with!"

The mother thought of the hopelessness of the situation. Her husband had run as deep into debt as he could — which was not very deep. He was saved from a magnificent bankruptcy — as so many

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of us are—by the difficulty of obtaining large credit. James Mead had not the personal magnetism that draws money from tight pockets; nor that hypnotism which adds compulsion to most unreasonable appeals, and builds a convincing picture of a solid future on the sands of a shiftless past.

But the few paltry debts he had managed to rake up here and there surrounded his life and his household with constant, incessant duns that could not be granted; with scorn and contempt that could not be resented; with petty, endless humiliations that were thorns and nettles in a bed where roses were rare.

If seventy-five cents could have been found by any means, it would have been turned over long ago as a sop to some of the virulent creditors. If there had been any concealed stockingful of coins, any old family heirlooms, any ancient brooch or ring, anything to pawn or sell for any conceivable amount, it would long ago have been coaxed or worried or threatened away.

These people were poor. At their table there were never any crumbs left. Why, they were too poor to keep a dog. And that is the last word in poverty.

Without the capital and the interest of the air, the sun, the broad, unclaimed tracts of land, wood, and game, and their own health and strength, the Meads would have been beggars. Mrs. Mead took in washing. Her earnings were always pledged weeks ahead — and for the necessary running expenses of soap (which she chiefly boiled out herself), and indigo, and the like, as well as for occasional

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absolute necessities in clothes and medicines for the family.

At the rare times when Jim Mead was able to exchange his abundant strength for coin of the country, he almost always turned it in as an encouragement to the keeper of the nearest liquor store.

Never in all her distresses had Mrs. Mead so much longed for a little money as now. Her mind ran over all the possible ways of raising cash. It had not far to run. It soon gave up in despair. Her streaming eyes swept the heavens for aid. They were the same old baby-blue skies, with sheepish white clouds drifting uselessly about.

"The age of miracles is over," her despair told her.

But what is that? What flashed across the air then — so sudden, so brilliant?

"Look, John!" she gasped, "see there! What is it? Maybe it's one of them cherubims, all head and wings, what's come to help us."

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VIII.

JOHN'S eyes looked through no film of hope. He saw the true nature of the cherub; he sighed.

"It's only a bird, Maw; they ain't no cherubims coming to help us. If they knowed or keered about us they'd a-be'n here long ago. The only things with wings what kin help us is the eagles on the five-franc pieces."

"But I ain't never seen no birds like that," his mother protested. "It looked like a live coal on wings. There it goes again!"

The bird left its tree and glided to another like a shooting star. John's keen eye studied it closely and quickly. He said:

"I ain't seen no such a bird before, neither. I wonder if — I tell you what it is, Maw. It's very skurse in these parts, and old Doctor Gibbs, who's a terrible birdologist, has offered us boys a reward of two dollars for one of 'em for his c'lection."

"What is it? Couldn't you ketch it?"

"I'll bet that there bird is a Virginyer Nightingale. He stays red all winter. But he's awful shy, and don't often git so far north. If I could on'y shoot him — or find his nest. Say, Maw, you watch him whilst I run for Paw's gun."

When John returned, toting his father's great primeval musket with much labour, his mother said:

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"He flew right into the heart of the big woods, John. It'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Better give him up, or wait till he comes back."

"Chances don't come back," the boy muttered. "I'll find him if it takes a week. Don't worry if I ain't home for dinner or supper."

And he plunged into the thick jungles of the ancient, unkempt forest, a young Siegfried following his destiny where it flew.

The woods closed round him like the waters of a deep sea. The great submarine silence was made audible by the myriad small noises, the shrillness of the insect populace, like a simmering cauldron. The wind flowing through the branches was as a river marching overhead. A few late-lingering birds were whistling, squawking, grunting, gossiping, flirting, vocalising, brawling; desperately busy and garrulous.

From the factory-clatter of this industrious people there was yet silence enough left to give a strange importance to the crackle and rustle of the boy's stealthy footsteps, to the little thumps of a fleeing toad, to the scutter of a twinkle-tailed squirrel, to the rasp of brushes swaying together.

Against the multifarious shimmer of all this motion, the boy's eye noted each dead leaf drifting down a spiral staircase to its grave; each special flutter that babbled of a catbird in a bush; each swoop of a nun-gray dove to the ground; the leap of a foppish jay to the branches; the swift shuttle of a humming-bird round wild honeysuckle.

The greens alone in the colour of this wood were

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legion, the other colours were infinity; yet against the cerise, the vermilion, pink, crimson, all the swaying reds, cardinals, madders, scarlets, that turned the autumnal forest into a very living sunset of colour, the boy sought one tint. There was one scarlet among all the scarlets, one texture, one motion among all the quivering fabrics that his eye sought. The others were as dead to him as all the corpses but one were in the eyes of Edith seeking King Harold's body on the cold field of Hastings.

The boy's heart gave a leap. He saw again a winged live coal flung across a long colonnade of trees. He ran, tugging the heavy musket as best he could; but a rat-tat-tat told him that it was only a red-headed woodpecker, the forest postman, knocking at somebody's door.

Again his heart lurched at a quick flight of fire down an aisle of smouldering green. When at last, all panting, he overtook the will-o'-the-wisp, it was a red-winged blackbird. The Indians say, "In its wings are the footprints of morning."

So the boy was lured on and on. A fallen sapling offered a trembling bridge across a stagnant pool of brown and green, like bronze eaten up with verdigris; a huge old log wallowing like a basking alligator crumbled and sank under his light step; bramble-bushes failed for all their claws to make his rags seem more ragged.

From under his poised foot a dark branch turned black snake and sliddered away; he did not pause to chase it. He stooped to lift a hanging bough that played portcullis in his path; a loud clatter of

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rattle-bones under his very hand gave him fair warning to leap back and escape venomous fangs.

He declined the challenge, and waived his rights to the highway.

A great cat of overgrown powers and overgrown appetite for blood of men or mice, appeared, and seemed willing to make a meal off what Providence had sent. But John called out:

"Go away, Mr. Wildcat, and mind your own business. I'm savin' this bullet in here for a very nice bird."

He seized a club from the ground, and ran yelling with all his might straight at the beast, which did not stop to argue, but retreated with the grace of a General Nathaniel Greene.

Keeping a careful watch against any later ambuscade in the branches of the trees, the boy ransacked the woods from end to end.

Hours and hours he searched and searched; but all in vain.

At the very farthest rim of the woods he flung himself down in the lap of a motherly old oak. He put his arms back under his head and yawned in utter weariness of flesh and spirit.

"Well, what's the use? I might's well look fer the end of a rainbow to git the pot of gold. I wish't I believed in fairies."

The infidel cast his cynical gaze idly upward. His eyes and mouth fell wide open. A private miracle had been performed to cure his skepticism.

On a bough almost over his head there blossomed, like a breathing, flying rose, the Virginia Nightingale!

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With a cry of joy the boy leaped to his feet. The bird leaped to its wings. Off it darted back into the forest. But the boy's eyes followed it, and fastened on it as if their vision were ribbons of silk. Without taking his eyes from the ember as it lessened in the distance, he stooped, groped for his gun, seized it, and ran fleetly but cautiously after.

The bird paused on a branch, and he caught well up with it. Then it was off again. He pursued. It was away before the gun was at his shoulder. It darted through a curtain of leaves. He dashed frantically after it. He stepped on the black snake he had missed before. A toad leaping out of his way was struck by his knee and knocked aside. He dived through the low-lying branch. The rattlesnake, from its coil, struck at him; it just missed his heel. There was no time for bridges; the boy rushed through the green pool, and left it for the Persian rugs of autumn leaves to dry his bare feet.

But for all his mad haste, the bird had eluded him. His despair was not cynical now, it was passionate; he searched the trees with furious gaze that devoured every detail.

At length he saw the nightingale half-hidden in a spray of leaves. He fell prone, thrust the gun-barrel across the dead log, and taking aim with an anguish of exactness, fired. The musket kicked him over, and a cloud of smoke rose like a black pall before him. He rose, rubbing his aching shoulder, and pushed through the smoke. The leaf that half hid the bird was floating to the ground, nipped from its twig. But the bird was not there. The very instant the boy's finger pressed the trigger,

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it had dropped like a plummet to the ground to seize a tempting gorgeous caterpillar. Pursued pursuing. The fine shot had whistled between its very wings. In the roar of the musket the bird forgot its hunger and fled in panic.

Reloading a gun in those days was a serious and complex business. By the time John's musket was charged for another attempt, the boy was almost sick with anxiety. Once more he must hunt the wandering flame.

But the closeness of its escape seemed to have stunned the wits of the poor fugitive, for John found it standing out sharp and red on the stark branch of a lightning-killed sycamore.

He dropped on one knee, and took aim again.

He lowered the gun and rubbed his eyes. He stared hard.

And well he might, for there on a higher branch of the tree was his casual acquaintance, the wildcat, crouched and tense for a spring at the bird.

The boy waited dumbly. The cat leapt. The bird with a little squeak attempted flight, but one paw was on its throat. It was caught.

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IX.

THE cat, purring over the tempting morsel, balanced itself with some trouble on the slender bough, and licked its chops like a gourmet, to rend what almost seemed to be John's own bleeding heart.

The boy aimed the gun again, now at the wildcat. He fired. But the stake was so great that his left elbow wavered on his knee. The bullet that was meant for his enemy's head only broke its right shoulder. With a furious spitting, clutching, and howling, the cat lost its place on the bough, and came tumbling earthward.

It landed lightly on its feet, and faced the boy with a snarl and a gleaming array of teeth. The lifeless bird, the innocent cause of the feud, thudded the ground near by.

Hoping once more to frighten the beast away, John clubbed the musket and rushed upon it with loud yells.

But now the wildcat is full of injured dignity, of pain and rage. It does not yield an inch. Indeed, it runs forward on three legs. It gathers for a spring, and lunges at John's throat. The musket sweeps round too late to crack the wildcat's skull, but just in time to knock it to one side. It drops to the ground, hardly bruised, and dashes at John's bare legs.

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The boy needed hardly less than a cat's agility to dodge that rush, and gain space to bring the long, heavy musket round in another sweep. This blow was more telling. It stunned the cat, and checked its ferocity. But it did not run; it snarled and circled round and round the boy.

With a swift, low, snaky approach, it passed under the musket, and seized on John's leg, ripping it cruelly with dagger-armed claws. John leaped away just in time to keep it from fastening on him, but his blow with musket clubbed misses. He will load again, keeping between the cat and their common prey.

He reaches for more powder. The horn is empty. He had not noted how light the supply was.

There is no hope of killing the wildcat. The musket is so long and clumsy that it serves badly, even for defence; wounds have given the wildcat an unusual courage; wounds are giving the boy a new feeling of fear. It seems best to retreat before he is too weakened by loss of blood to get away. The bird that meant so much — well, it is better to live unlearned than to die unlearned.

With infinite regret John began to limp backward, swingeing at the wildcat with his musket. Behind him he heard the sound of feet rattling through the dead leaves. He wondered if it were the mate of this wildcat coming to its rescue. There was nothing for him to do but wait. He dared not turn around. He simply hunched his back to receive what Fate sent.

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X.

IT was his mother's hand that blessed his anxious shoulder.

"I heard ye yellin', Johnnie," she explained, hurriedly, "an' grabbed the old horse-pistol. Wheres shall I shoot the varmint?"

"Gimme the pistol, Maw," the boy muttered, his strength oozing from him swiftly. He went forward with a feline care, bending low, and approaching the snarling, spitting beast like another cat. Those old horse-pistols had only one shot, but they were as effectual as a hand-cannon — if they hit. John was taking a desperate chance, but while there was a chance, he wanted it. Right up to the teeth of the tense wildcat he crept, while his mother followed with the musket uplifted grimly. Right into the teeth of the cat he fired, and his mother brought down the butt of the musket at the back of its head.

There was a muffled shot, a thump; the cat's rigidity wriggled away into the limpness of death. The boy went over on his side as if lifeless.

His frightened mother bent to pick him up. But with a sudden recurrence of power he writhed out of her reach, and squirmed along the ground as if seeking something. His mother paused, awestruck at what she thought delirium, but in a moment he lifted a handful of leaves. Among them was a great warm ruby that was but lately living and joyous.

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"See, Maw. This is the — the — Virginyer Nighting—"

Then he fainted. He could afford to faint now. His mother bent and scooped him into her arms and her apron. She strode heavily but quickly home with him. In his clutch he kept the bird. About him clung a few red autumn leaves. They were stained with certain redder drops that came from the wounds of neither the wildcat nor the Virginia Nightingale.

John's father was at home when they reached the cabin. Mrs. Mead called to him to draw a bucket of water at the well. He was enough alarmed at the lifelessness of his boy to forget the usual laziness. He ran at once. The pump, with its great overhanging lever, looked like the fishing-pole of some gigantic Simple Simon fishing in his mother's pail. Jim Mead lowered the ancient bucket overgrown with green till it looked more like a flower-pot. Jim found eternal pleasure in the fact that the weight of the long, overhanging sweep brought the bucket back without effort on his part, and did not require the labour of the windlass-pump. He would have enjoyed a windmill better yet.

The only pleasure he found in the cold, clear water of the bucket was when it chilled and soothed the feverish aftermath of his drunkenness.

The water gave him no other thrill of delight for all the mellow symphony of colour that shone through it, for all the candour and hale good cheer that sent it bounding over the brim in crystal hilarity, as the old bucket came jogging to the upper air. Jim

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Mead preferred the *veritas in vino*, for all its after bitterness in the mouth, to the quality of truth that comes pure and wholesome from the bottom of the well.

By the time he returned to the cabin with the water, Mrs. Mead had hastily laid on the shelf over the fireplace the bird whose capture had meant so much, and still meant more. She knew that if her husband once realised that the little remains of flesh and fluff represented a small fortune of real money, that money would never be spent in school-books.

As she worked eagerly over her boy, dashing a big tin dipperful of water across his face to bring him back to consciousness, cleansing away the blood, and bandaging the wounds, which she rejoiced to find not serious, she explained to her husband the adventure with the wildcat, without explaining the origin of it.

Under pretence of kissing her boy, she whispered to John that she had hidden the bird on the mantel.

She had hardly made John understand, when they heard Jim Mead knocking the ashes out of his pipe. Both knew that he would next go to the mantel to find more fuel in his tobacco-box, which he kept there.

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XI.

MRS. MEAD rose to her feet to intercept him, but he was there before her, and, fumbling about, laid hand on the Virginia Nightingale. His surprise gave way to rage. He roared:

"Who in hell put that damned bird there?" and, grabbing it, hurled it through the door. If he had thrown away a priceless jewel, the scornful gesture could not have hurt John more. He gave a shriek of pain, and would have fallen to the ground had he not dropped into his mother's ready arms. She whispered again to him that she would recover the treasure.

Jim Mead lighted his pipe by neatly setting a live coal to its bowl. Then he stumbled out to lean on the fence, and send his smoke lazily into the twilight. As he passed the Virginia Nightingale, he gave it a kick.

His habitual indifference did not lead him to turn round and see that his wife carefully picked up the bird, brushed off its dusty velvet, and carried it to the cold cellar, which was half a cave, and half a little sunken hut, some distance from the house.

The next morning John felt strong enough to take the bird to Doctor Gibbs.

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He limped painfully to the road, and was given a lift by a farmer going townward with a wagon-load of pigs.

The boy, after much questioning, yelled the story of his adventure to the farmer as best he could, while the pigs grunted and screamed deafeningly, and the springless wagon clattered and jounced him in irregular staccato.

The old man, Elkanah Tew by name, was mightily pleased with the boy's determined ambition. He himself had known the hunger for books. He had come from New England as a young man, after he had spent a year at Yale — a year of book-embowered Paradise, whence poverty with two-edged sword exiled him. He had brought with him as his library, a few of his college books, a Latin grammar, a copy of Cæsar's "Gallic War" (of which he remembered, as most of us do, only the first sentence, and the difficulties of the indirect discourse), and Vergil, Horace' odes, "Paradise Lost," and "The Plays of William Shakespeare."

He also eked out enough to subscribe to a weekly paper. Though it reached him only after the news had gone mouldy, it kept the foreign world and the events of politics and city life from becoming, as to the other pioneers in the wilderness, a world of small reality and infrequent fable.

Elkanah Tew lent his copy of the paper first to the parson (who got many of his few ideas from its columns), then to the village physician, Doctor Leith, then to various others, till it was worn almost too threadbare to keep. But none cared to borrow the Euclid, or the Latin grammar, or the

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others; and Milton remained mute and inglorious on the whatnot, along with the piece of coral, the seashell (a wonderful thing a thousand miles inland), and the flowers made out of human hair, cut paper, and wax.

When Mr. Tew heard how John was agonising for a little learning, his heart warmed to him with the free-masonry of the pious lovers of knowledge for its own sweet sake. He thought of the ardent student he had himself been before circumstances beat him down to a close face-to-face wrestle with the stingy earth, where he learned much ground-lore and forgot the stars; where the chronicles of the fickle weather, and the petty country rivalries were everything, and the lofty dramas of history and of world-destinies were as the gossip of neighbours who lived too far away to be real.

He told John of the books he had. He offered to lend him them. The boy almost bounced off the seat with rapture.

The old man chuckled.

"I s'pose you're ruther rusty on yer Latin, hay?"

"What's Latin?" said John.

The old man saddened at the thought of the vast profundities of which human ignorance is capable.

"It's a dead language, sonny," he said, "that the old Romans useter speak."

John wanted to ask who the Romans were, but the look of horror that had greeted his query as to Latin, brought forward his diplomacy.

He simply said: "Oh!"

He put as much wisdom as possible in the ex-

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clamation, but short as the word was, it was big with ill-hidden curiosity.

"The Romans, ez you know," the old man said, with profound courtesy, "once owned all the world."

"And America, too?"

"Well, no; America hadn't been found out yit."

"Why, I thought America wuz allers here."

"I s'pose it wuz, but Yurrup didn't know about it till Christopher Columbus 'scovered it."

"Oh, yes," John said, with great dignity. "I've heard about C'lumbus."

"Well, I wuz tellin' you 'bout Latin."

"Umm! whut's it like?"

The road had dipped into the bed of a little brook all dappled and spangled with sun-glow and leaf-shadow. The horses stopped and sank their muzzles into the cool stream and drank gratefully and deep. Even the pigs ceased to complain, and sniffed contentment. The soft breeze swept across the face of the old man like the hair of the sweetheart whom he had called his Muse — in the old long-since. Forgotten thoughts stirred in the darker rooms of his memory, as a sleeper wakes deliciously when a silent hand draws a curtain and lets in the full sunlight.

He dreamed a whit, then woke to the boy's query, and called out, in a voice that was cracked and blatant, but rang in the boy's ear like a silver bugle:

"'*Arma virumque cano, Trojæ qui primus ab oris* —' I — I guess that's all I remember."

The poor old man faltered ashamed into silence, but the boy whispered, reverentially:

"Was — was that Latin?"

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When the old man nodded, the boy murmured: "Say it again."

The elder took the encore with delight, and the boy sighed: "I wisht I could learn something like that. It's — oh, it's jest splendificent."

So they sat there and rehearsed it till John knew it and could parrot it to perfection.

Thereafter, the aroma of poetry and the rhythm of metre had always some association with a shallow ford under autumnal trees, a clear brook dancing along its way in dactyls of rapture, while the sun dozed, a breeze purred, and two horses flung up their heads and their fluttering manes, and shook from their muzzles cool drops of water that tinkled back to the stream.

The man and the boy tarried over their Latin till the horses, tired of drinking, turned their heads to look back in questioning surprise. Then Elkanah sang out, "G'lang!" and flicked them with a friendly whip; they bounded along their way, the wheels cut hissing through the brook, and the pigs took up their chorus. On the level, the horses unrestrained broke into a boisterous gallop. This brought back one more line to Elkanah's memory.

"This here gallopin' makes me rec'lec' one more line from that feller, Vergil, where he's describin' a horse gallopin', an' it sounds 'zactly like it. Listen:

"'*Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.*'"

This line, too, John must learn. The old man was only too glad to repeat and repeat. He was as proud of the relics of former learning as Beli-

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sarius might have been, musing in his inglorious old age over two little cameos that remained from all the spoil of his captured cities.

Elkanah drove up to the shop of Doctor Gibbs with a flourish, and announced to the druggist that a gentleman of great Latin culture and a young Nimrod all in one had come to visit him.

Doctor. Gibbs knew only as much Latin as he found on his many bottles, and he was not always sure of that. But in view of the illegible prescriptions the country physicians scrawled, and in view of the fact that calomel was almost always the chief ingredient of the prescriptions, it rarely made a fatal difference if he did mix up the bottles. The cistern whence he drew his *Aqua distillata* had a pure spring. The labels were useful in striking with awe the farmers who wanted arnica, paregoric, and the latest patent nostrum; and the climate or the political party in power was blamed for all the ills.

Doctor Gibbs did not risk his reputation probing John's culture. He took the Virginia Nightingale, called it by its old-fashioned Linnean name, and counted out two dollars in dimes and picayunes and pence.

Mr. Brown presided over the transaction, bit one of the coins suspiciously, and found it bad.

"It's funny," he said, "how folks'll go and counterfeit a ten-cent piece. Seem's if I was goin' to sell my soul, I'd make Satan bid higher'n a dime. I'd want at least a shillin' for my soul."

Doctor Gibbs sheepishly gave John another dime, and restored the corrupt coin to the cash drawer, to be sent along its way later.

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When John had emptied his jingling money into his pockets, he felt for the first time the oppressive weight and anxiety of wealth. The whole world took on at once a malicious aspect. Village loafers seemed to be lounging outside to waylay him. People who disappeared round corners or into doors were evidently just preparing an ambush. He would hardly have trusted the constable to escort him home.

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XII.

JOHN was relieved from this anxiety by a greater. Elkanah said:

"Well, Mr. Millionaire, what ye goin' to dew with all that bag o' gold? Buy a farm or git yerself 'lected to Congress?"

"I was cal'latin' to save out the six bits fer my books, an' spend the rest on somethin' fine fer Maw."

"Oh, wuz ye now? Well, you're a son wuth havin'. Did ye opine to git yer mother a camel's hair shawl, or a hoss and buggy with yer dollar and a quarter?"

"I hadn't no idee whut to git. It's turrible hard to spend money, ain't it?"

"That's the least o' my troubles. My money comes out of the shell with its wings all spread. But I'd 'vise you to take the money home to yer Maw an' let her decide. You might get her a di'mon' necklace that wouldn't match her silk dress, or make some mistake like that. But I'd spend five cents first for a piece of rope."

"What fer?" said John, expecting some rural joke, "to hang myself with?"

"No, but to tie onto the left hind leg of another pig — one of them in my wagon. There's one more there than I kin sell to 'dvantage, so I'd be

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right smart thankful if you'd take him off my hands."

The boy could hardly believe his ears. "Why, Mr. Tew, first you say you'll loan me your books, and then you give me a pig."

"Who said anything about givin' you a pig? It's you that's doin' me the favour. See that shoat there — that Berkshire? Well, I've taken a dislike to him — I mean her. She's an awful or'nary little brute, an' I don' like her singin'-voice. You buy a piece of rope an' git that pig outer my sight, or I'll — I'll give her to the sheriff."

John ran hastily to bargain for a piece of stout cord at the general store where they sold everything and a few sundries.

He brought back the cord; Mr. Tew fastened it on the squealing porker, and said:

"I'll leave them books fer you the first time I drive by your palatial mansion. Now, skedaddle and scoot."

He dropped the pig to the ground, and John had so much ado to disentangle himself from the rope that he had no time for thanks or farewells. He went flying homewards, hanging on to the cord with one hand, the other hand clinging to the vast horde of small change in his pocket.

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XIII.

A MORE vivid story of the struggle of man with animal perversity could hardly be found than the homeward pilgrimage of the boy and the pig. Between hanging back to keep the runaway from carrying him off his feet, and leaning forward trying to tug the balky shoat along, and dragging it out from under horses and wheels, laboriously decoying it back through holes in fences and hedges, little time was left to the boy for meditation. That little he spent over Mr. Tew's advice. He decided finally that if he took the money home to his mother, one of two undesirable things would happen: either she would spend it on him, on shoes or clothing or something, or else his father would get it away from her and spend it on liquid refreshment.

The only way to force his mother to get the benefit of the windfall was plainly to spend it for her. But what to spend it on — ay, there's the rub!

At this critical moment there loomed across the horizon the large and irregular outline of a pedlar, the Santa Claus of new regions. These pedlars, who like the snail carried their own warehouses on their backs, were always fascinating to John. They were travelled gentlemen and eloquent of tongue.

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To-day he stared at this specimen of peripatetic philosophy with greater interest than ever.

But the knight-errant was not for returning the stare. A ragged boy, plus an undignified pig, promised no profitable conversation. So the pedlar stalked past. John, turning to watch him, saw a rear elevation of great splendour. He called out:

"Hay, Mister, what'cher gotter sell?"

"Nothin' that don't cost hard money, bub."

The word "bub" always angered John, but he sang out, carelessly:

"Well, maybe I got some money."

There was a tang of authority in John's tone that checked the wayfarer. He turned, and doffing his scornful manner, said:

"Well, bub, if you've got real money, I've got most everything else. If you don't see what you want, ask for it. No trouble to show goods. My effort is to please. What might you want?"

"Sump'n fer Maw."

"Oh, something for a lady. Do you want joolery or real imitation lace, or somethin' useful as well as ornymental? How much might you want to spend, or is price no objick?"

"I got jes *so* much an no more."

"Oho! Well, nothin' like knowin' your own mind and purse. And how much is *so* much?"

"Lemme see whatcher got," was John's evasive answer. The pedlar wriggled out of his harness, and displayed trinkets and gewgaws galore. John put his head first on one side, then on the other; he twisted his lips to the right, and then to the left, he pursed them, knitted his brows, and tried to

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look wise, as he had seen his elders playing their little rôles in the farce of marketing. But decision would not come.

There were tin pans of dazzling splendour, and household utensils of all ingenuity. But he wanted something purely beautiful, and to his mind the purely beautiful must be utterly useless. There were watch-chains guaranteed to be of solid plate, but they were out of sight; the pedlar offered one for the pig, but John felt that honour forbade his giving away a gift just given.

There was a pair of green kid gloves warranted (not by the pedlar) to kill any possible costume at one blow. For these he asked two dollars, and John came very near sacrificing education and all for the luxury of seeing his mother in these. But he feared her reproaches if he returned without money for the books.

"What are these here things? Di'monds?"

"Yes," said the pedlar, "them's solid gold ear-bobs with diamond solitaires. They're all the style now in Noo York. But your Maw must have a pair. All the fine ladies has."

"How much?" John grunted, importantly.

"Ten dollars is dirt cheap fer 'em. I'll let you have 'em fur five dollars and a quarter, seein' it's you, and they're the last I got in stock."

He gradually descended to a dollar and twenty-five cents. The profit on the sale was about three hundred per cent. as it was.

John hurried home, dragging his anchor in spite of its squeals. With rapture he showed his mother the pig he had been given and the ear-rings — long,

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elaborate horrors of brass and glass. Even his mother could hardly restrain her amusement at his choice long enough to bless him for the kindness that hallowed it.

That night she cried herself to sleep, thinking what all that money would have meant. Which does not mean that she would have sold those ear-rings for any price imaginable.

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XIV.

THE school-book followed close on the axe, the gun, and the plow in the quick conquest of the American wilderness. But the schooling must of necessity wait its turn between harvest moon and spring sun.

During the winter months the farmers simply waited for the earth to wake up again. It was a pretty busy wait, and an arduous idleness, but there was leisure enough for the young to learn the three R's, to have quilting-parties, singing-school, spelling bees, and moonlight sleigh-rides.

John went back to school the next day after his return with the pig and the diamond ear-bobs.

He stalked up to the desk, plunked down his seventy-five cents with an heroic effort to keep his eyes from lingering on it, and took the books. He squeezed them as if they were the hands of some loved woman, and stood dreaming; he lingered, looking proudly about the room, as Hannibal surveying a Roman army. He was yanked out of his heaven by his teacher, who, taking him by the collar, marched him to a seat and sat him in it with needless positiveness.

John loved the martinet no better for this first laying on of hands. When his eyes ceased to dance and his spine to tingle, he looked at the youth who shared the bench and the rough desk with him.

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To his disgust and glee he looked into the shifty little eyes of Peter Platt, the Informer. John edged away in repugnance; then slid swiftly back and shunted his ancient enemy off the seat and on to the floor.

The teacher was wiping some offensive caricatures from the blackboard. By the time he had whirled round Peter was in his seat again.

"Who made that noise?" he demanded, looking piercingly at nobody in particular. A true boy would have saved his revenge for an out-of-door scrimmage at recess.

Not so with the Informer.

He rose, snapping his fingers.

John, seizing his coat tail, pulled him back with a slam. Adopting a policy of non-resistance, the Informer sat still, but sang out, shrilly:

"Please, Mr. Clinton, Johnnie Mead he bunted me on to the floor."

"John Mead, come here!" thundered the pedagogue in a tone that froze the blood of Lucy Darr.

John came forward to the edge of the aisle, and said, "What do you want of me?"

"Did you shove Peter Platt off his bench?"

"Yes, sir."

The teacher lifted his desk-lid and took out a birch rod, which he bent with the joy of a Spanish conquistador twirling his Toledo.

"You ain't a-goin' to whip me, are you?" John asked, anxiously.

And when the teacher nodded and beckoned grimly, John's lawyerlike soul parleyed.

"I didn't see no rule agin it."

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The teacher sniffed.

John pleaded.

"You didn't tell me not to."

The teacher disdained to answer, save by curling his forefinger invitingly.

"I promise you I won't do it again."

The teacher sneered.

John played his last card; he would dissolve the partnership.

"I guess I won't come to your school. Gi' me my money back, and you can have your books."

The teacher rose impatiently and started for the boy, prepared to head off any dash for the door or window. John's rule was to retreat if possible from a superior force, but never to surrender until exhausted, if caught at bay. When battle was not to be avoided, he believed in getting the advantage of beginning it.

So now he flung off his coat and dashed at the teacher, as the wildcat had dashed at him. He ducked under the rod and rammed his head into the teacher's waistcoat, with that sound which has always been called dull and sickening. As Clinton went over backward he carried with him his desk. The bottle of ink described a black parabola, and ended in a splash, into which landed and stuck the large red apple brought by the Informer, who aspired to the hateful post of "Teacher's pet."

Every which way went the various contraband of war captured from the pupils.

John stood with panting heart and arms folded, and surveyed the wreckage with anxious calm. A wild shriek of glee went up from the delighted audi-

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ence, and John recognised Lucy's voice as the most glad and the longest sustained.

The pæan stopped short, however, as Clinton rose to his six feet of height in a rage that rose like a tower.

He rushed on his small adversary, who had scorned to strike a fallen enemy. The teacher did not scorn to use a weapon on the unarmed lad. He slashed him over the head with the whip, and in the cyclonic vortex that followed, he gradually beat John to the floor, knelt on his arms, and sat with suffocating heaviness on his chest.

"Now," he gasped, in breathless fury, "you young imp, will you obey me?"

"I — never disobeyed you," John muttered; he was struck in the face for his literalness.

"Will you obey me after this, then?"

"It 'pends on what you want me to do," was the dogged reply John could not help muttering, though he foresaw the dazzling blow in the face.

"Promise me you'll do just as I tell you, or I'll beat you to a pulp."

No answer. John closed his eyes, but he saw splashes of light.

"I'll break that will of yours, you little pauper cur. I won't let you up till you promise." He began cuffing the boy's head viciously, from one side to the other.

John was in bitter pain for lack of breath, from the weight of his oppressor, and the sharpness of his shins across John's forearms, from the hardness of the floor, and from the stinging blows and the bewilderment in his buffeted head. He wondered

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how long it would be before a merciful unconsciousness would end his suffering. That was the only end he could see. To make a solemn promise under duress, with the intention to break it, was an avenue of escape that did not attract him.

At length, as he winced from an expected blow, it did not fall. He opened his eyes. Clinton was turning his head back in amazement. Over his shoulder, John saw Lucy Darr with a strangely old and firm look in her eyes. She held Clinton's uplifted hand, as she pleaded:

"Oh, please, please, don't hit him again."

"Let go of my hand and go back to your seat," Clinton commanded. Lucy's appeal took on a tinge of contempt.

"It's a shame for a grea' big man like you to pick on a little boy like him."

"Go back to your seat and stay there through recess." He wrenched his hand loose and raised it again. Again Lucy seized it in both of her arms, and cried:

"If you dare touch him again, I'll make my father have you put out of the school."

Lucy's father was one of the school directors. The teacher had begun his "boarding round" at the home of the Darrs.

He had seen how Lucy ruled the whole family with the gentle despotism of a child whom no homage can spoil.

Clinton said to John:

"Since Lucy asked me, I'll let you up, if you'll promise."

John's eyes, which had streamed gratitude into

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Lucy's, turned hard and cold in Clinton's gaze, and did not answer.

After a moment of painful indecision, Clinton said, with a dark smile:

"I'll give you one more chance. Get up and study your lesson."

Lucy went back and had a good cry. John rose, put on his coat, and sank back into his seat, too dizzy still to know his own mind.

During the war the Informer had moved to another seat.

The twang and drawl of recitation began against a background of buzzing and whispering from minds whose lips must keep them company. The Informer went forward to recite, but though he had his lesson by heart, his answers seemed to give no pleasure to the teacher, on whose head he had brought public humiliation.

John sat glaring at a book, and never noticing that he had stood it on its head. He felt faint with rage and battle ardour.

Before he could fathom his own feelings, recess time arrived. He rose when he saw the schoolroom empty. At the door he was met by one of the largest boys, a young farmer. His height was a triumph of addition, but mentally he was hardly up to his multiplication table.

This giant, Silas Stibbs, led John to a far corner of the playground, whither by much nodding and winking he brought four or five other large boys. This group could easily have overpowered the teacher and released John, but a vague sense of

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discipline had awed them, and left the rescue to a young girl's courage.

The cause of the conference Silas soon explained:

"We've ben a-countin' on dumpin' teacher in a snowdrift, and stackin' the benches in a bunch. But I reckon it's goin' to be a sort of a open winter. It might be a month 'fore snow flies. I say we put him out now. He's no 'count, anyway, an' the sooner he's throwed out, the better."

The plot succeeded at once. The ringleaders called in others. John had been given the incalculable honour of being a ringleader, as a reward for his spunk.

Wrath was still rancorous in him, and he joined the conspiracy with wild delight. Other boys were brought over one by one, and by the time the recess bell rang, the students marched in, not as a mob, but as a revenging army.

At a preconcerted signal the boys yelled in lusty, well-rehearsed chorus:

"We don't like you, Mr. Clinton; we won't have you, Mr. Clinton, so git out, or we'll put you out."

The schoolgirls huddled together in a screaming, gasping mass. Clinton turned a little pale, and in a husky voice, ordered the mutineers to their seats.

Then they made for him. He received them with pluck. The first wished they had been last. But Clinton was fairly smothered by numbers. He had no more chance than Bishop Hatto had against his rats.

The boys, having overpowered their late master, took him by the arms and legs, carried him kicking

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and plunging through the door with much difficulty, and ran with him to a great heap of autumn leaves that had been made ready for a bonfire. Into this they dumped him.

By the time he had risen, spluttering in the dust and pulling the leaves out of his neck and sleeves, the pirates were back in the schoolhouse, the door was locked, and he was warned through the window to go home.

Poor Clinton approached and harangued them, but they yelled him down, and threw out at him his possessions, including the inky apple, which took him in the eye. It grieved Peter Platt to see his cautious investment so wasted.

At length Clinton turned and went away. He hurried to Colonel Darr's house, told of his eviction, and demanded aid and restoration.

He got the answer he had expected. Colonel Darr grunted:

"If you can't keep those cubs in order yourself, I guess you'd better try some other place, where the boys grow smaller."

Clinton nodded sadly, went to his room, packed his trunk, signed a receipt for his money, and was driven to the next town.

He had done his best. He had a widowed mother to support, and there was a bright-eyed girl who had long ago promised to marry him when he got settled in a school.

The night before, he had written to her a letter asking her to come to him; he had already bespoken the parson. As he rode away, he flung the white bits of this letter to the wind, which buoyed them up

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awhile, then let them fall to the dust — snowflakes of hope.

John went home like a conqueror, flung down his books, and told his mother of his great struggles, of Lucy's deed, and the downfall of their tyrant. Almost anything that made John proud or happy pleased his mother, and she beamed on him across a tub that seemed to be full of clotted cream.

The next morning it dawned on John that there was no more school to go to.

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XV.

IT was as if the sun clambering out of the cellar of night had stuck fast on the trap-door of the horizon.

John was sorry he had not taken his punishment, however unjust, for he saw that his resistance had brought the discipline of the school to a short stop on its smooth current. He was the stubborn log that had caused a great jam and then a grand smash-up. He was ashamed of his success, and his triumph had defeated him.

There was nothing to do but take up the dreary round of his life again. But he was no longer a boy finding bliss in ignorance. He was a student solemnly ambitious, and now flung back into a childhood that could no longer entertain him.

He wandered over to the sty where his pig was. John had named her Vergil. But she was rather a dirty little Miss Diogenes, with a lantern-like nose and a deep affection for investigation.

John had heard of educated pigs. He wondered if he himself would ever be better educated. He felt that he was getting very old. Here he was, a veteran of fifteen, and just entering school. The Informer was younger than he, and yet the subjects on which he had recited were beyond John's comprehension or imagination. For once, a day had seemed long to him. He paced his familiar haunts

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with restless regret. The woods, the versatile, ever-consoling woods, gave him no comfort; each tree seemed a famous man, a soldier or writer whose very name he never heard; every vista retreating into the inner dusk of the forest was a cavern of ignorance. Ambition nagged after him, biting at his heels like a lean wolf that he could neither escape nor appease.

The late afternoon found him loitering at a cross-roads. One finger pointed into the trivial village which was to him a great city; the other to the county poorhouse. It was easy to see which path his father had chosen. John had hoped to break loose; he wanted to progress, not to drift. But plainly his chance was gone.

So steeped was he in melancholy that he did not hear the uproarious approach of a wagon. He was awakened by the cheery hail of Mr. Elkanah Tew.

"Excuse me, Hamlet, fer int'ruptin' yer s'liloquy, but do ye want to git run over?"

"Evenin', Mr. Too," John answered, sadly.

"Hullo! Whut's up? Is the hinge come off the universe?"

"School's closed."

"That's what's the matter, eh? And you've spent your seventy-five cents, too. That is tough."

"Durn the six bits. I wanted to learn somethin'."

"I see Othello's out of a job, as Shakespeare said."

"Was Shakespeare another one of them Romans?"

Elkanah Tew stood up straight. He could not stare hard enough, sitting down.

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"Do you mean tew say, you ain't heard of Will-i-am Shakespeare?"

John answered with magnificent languor.

"Oh, his name was Bill? Then he must 'a' been an American."

"Sufferin' corn-meal! I! — you! — say! — climb in here, boy, an' come home with me. Don't you waste another minute without knowin' who old Bill Shake was."

John clambered in. The old man snapped the lines, and the horses jogged on. In the drive of several miles, Mr. Tew yelled a brief biography of the villager from Avon into the little ear perked greedily up for knowledge.

Mr. Tew's homestead, once it was reached, showed a pathetic love of beauty and grace. Everywhere there was proof of the man's unwillingness to give his whole soul to the battle with the soil. He preferred to build a homely peace, rather than neatness and order. It was only the mantle of contentment that could hide the gauntness of poverty. Only the shelter and the tenderness given to the wildflowers atoned for the license given the roving weeds.

"Rosalind!" the old man called; then explained, "M' wife's real name's Betsy, but I call her Rosalind because that's one of Shakespeare's best girls, and my wife come out into the wilderness and roughed it with me, just like Rosalind did with her beau."

An old woman came to the door, and looked out through the vines that dangled in autumnal weariness and rust from the trellises. They seemed to

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have some kinship with her. She had been her husband's one true companion; she sympathised with him, believed in him, without understanding him; loved him without knowing him.

She, a New England woman, had consented to the shiftless disorderliness that he enjoyed, because her relentless discipline over inanimate objects distressed him.

She, born Betsy, did her best to play Rosalind to his fancy.

She had been repaid full-fold. He had never ceased to look at her through a poet's eyes; he cherished her with a poet's heart. The love-speeches he made her were other men's words, but in their art he collaborated with his own great soul. The poet was Will Shakespeare, but he was Dick Burbage.

"Rosalind, my dear," said Elkanah, over his shoulder, as he hastily unhitched the horses, to send them all harnessed to their stalls, and leave the wagon where it was for the night. "Rosalind, you make Mr. Mead some of them sonnets that you call waffles, and besides maple surrup, we'll give him what's sweeter and more — more golden; that's Shakespeare."

And even so it was done. John sat down to a pitiful little meal; but it was, to his starved body, a banquet of ambrosia and nectar. In place of the quarrels that raged over his own board, his famished little soul revelled in sonorous music welling from the lips of Elkanah Tew, who propped against a sugar-bowl a weather-stained, worship-worn volume, and forgot to eat as he chanted the inspired verses, — forgot everything except the love that

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made him now and then reach out one trembling hand to clasp the waiting palm of his wife.

Mr. Tew's silken waffles grew cold as he read. But John was young enough in body and soul to find a double, equal bliss in the food of the gods, and in such symphonic stateliness as rolls the chariot of these lines along:

> "'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,
> The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
> The inter-tissued robe of gold and pearl,
> The farced title running 'fore the King,
> The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp,
> That beats upon the high shore of this world,
> No, not all these, thrice gorgeous ceremony,
> Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
> Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,
> Who, with the body fill'd and vacant mind
> Gets him to rest cramm'd with distressful bread;
> But, like a lackey, from the rise to set,
> Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
> Sleeps in Elysium; next day, after dawn,
> Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse;
> And follows so the ever running year
> With profitable labour to his grave."

"And what might you think of that?" said Mr. Tew.

John shook his head helplessly, and only sighed.

Mr. Tew was relentless.

"Can't you quite make it out?"

John answered, slowly:

"No, I can't quite make out what it's all about, but — but — well, it's just like this here waffle. I don't know just 'zactly what Mrs. Tew put into

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it, but all the same, it tastes awful good. Did you ever climb a tree, lookin' fer a bird's-nest, an' then find, up in a holler in the crotch of a limb, a big comb of honey made by wild bees? Well, Shakespeare seems to me like eatin' wild honey up in a tree in the big woods with birds singin' everywheres araound. I could listen to you read it all night."

They left the supper table, and Mr. Tew would not let his wife interrupt the communion by clearing off the things. The dishes could wait until morning. Shakespeare was more important. With a despairing smile, the housewife got out her sewing, and listened benignly as her husband read the lines, whose sound was to her as a familiar melody of which she had never learned the words.

The insatiable old man and his enraptured proselyte might have spent the night in the Shakespeare world, but, by and by, the knitting needles in "Rosalind's" hand ceased their duel; her head sank. She slept.

It was some time before Elkanah saw that she was asleep, then he shut the book softly, and finished out the scene from memory, gradually lowering his voice. A clock boomed soothingly the hour of nine. She did not waken. Elkanah bent over and whispered to John:

> "'Tis now the very witching hour of nine
> When good boys yawn and wise folks go to bed.

"You live so far away, you'd better bunk here for the night in the guest's chamber."

John came back to earth with a jar.

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"My mother!" he exclaimed, "she'll be worried to death! I clean forgot. She don't know where I'm at."

In a few minutes he was out in the road, hurrying homeward under the stars. They beamed on him with a new good-fellowship. The road was lonely, but he gave it no thought; he felt in brotherhood with all nature. The thrills that ran through him were not from fear, nor yet from the nip of the evening wind prophesying winter, nor was the swift flutter of his heart due to either fear or haste — under his arm he hugged the volume of Shakespeare.

"Take it home with you for a week," Mr. Tew had insisted; "I can spare it awhile, seein' as how I know 'most all of it by heart."

The miles to John's home did not seem long, and the mysteries of the night did not oppress him. Strange shapes, stealthy noises, ghostly lights, and spookish shadows lacked their wonted dread. He ran and walked in very ecstasy, till — suddenly he stopped short, his heart jumped in him, then struggled like a caged thrush. He remembered that he was about to pass a little graveyard which held the bodies of a family that had been massacred by the Indians in the Black Hawk war.

The savages had set the house on fire, too, but a sudden rain had saved it. It was said to be haunted. Credible witnesses had declared that they had seen the old butchery enacted there at dead of night, the ghostly actors again waking from sleep to the unspeakable horrors of Indian slaughter.

John had heard them tell at the grocery-store that

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a tramp who had sought shelter there one night, had been driven out into the storm by fear as he saw the tragedy played out. The tramp, they said, had gone mad, and his hair turned like snow in one day.

Some people did not believe in ghosts, but John remembered, as he stood there shivering in the hollow, that the Bible told of a ghost. With a sudden panic he remembered that Shakespeare confirmed the theory. Did not Hamlet's murdered father walk every night? Mr. Tew had started to read "Hamlet," but seeing the boy's wild alarm, had changed the subject to the wrestling match in "As You Like It." But John recalled it now.

On the horizon near where the road went over a hill, he could see the grim silhouette of the haunted house. Even as he stared, a red glow flared up within it, filling its stark rafters with fire. And above the night-wind's own eerie moan, rose faintly the wail of a woman's voice. The cry grew more wild each moment. Then he saw on the horizon line a woman's form appear. She was running, and her hair was flowing wildly.

John dared not look to see the Indian that must be following her with bloody tomahawk. He sank down behind a heavy bush and hid his eyes.

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XVI.

THE woman's screams grew louder and keener.

At length John made out the message of the voice. It was calling his own name.

"John! John! Where are you?"

He leaped to his feet and ran crying:

"Mother, mother, here I am!"

And his mother gathered to her arms the lost lamb she had sought far and wide. She rained kisses and tears on him, and forgave his heedlessness as soon as she heard its cause. In mutual embrace they moved homeward, just as the moon rose huge and red from behind the haunted house.

The next day John chiefly spent in the company of the book he had brought home. Many of the words he could not understand until his mother explained them. Many of them, he found, to his amazement, were beyond even her marvellous fund of knowledge.

Mrs. Mead herself was caught by the infection of the poet's ineffable humanity, and memorised a few of the lines, whose homeliness she found most pat.

That night, while his father and mother were sound asleep in the loft above, the craving to learn, the passion to read, the mania to understand, kept John's eye wide and alert.

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At length he could stand the torment no longer. He looked out into the room, and saw by the light of the expiring fire that his brothers and sisters on their rude cots were all drugged with the opium of childhood weariness.

Like an ancient sage, he envied them their peace. Then he decided that he did not envy them.

He rose, wrapped the blanket around him, took from under his pillow the precious book, delicately set upon the fire a pine-knot, and, as the blaze seized hold of the luscious resinous food, he laid himself on the floor and read. He read until the straight lines began to waver and the letters to fall together like tumbled cards.

The black gloom outside, that filled the window, had softened to a woolly gray, and a few scarlet threads had ravelled out of the hem of the eastern sky before he crept shivering back to his cot. He had been reading about Falstaff. He had learned from Shakespeare what his father had never shown him — that there is a comic aspect to drunkenness. He wished he had known it before. No arnica or witch-hazel is so good for bruises and heartaches as the original panacea, laughter.

A month passed while a new teacher was being found for the school. This month had been blessed with many a feast on Elkanah Tew's hospitality. The consumption of pine-knots had greatly increased at the Mead mansion. But as Mr. James Mead did not stoop to the splitting of them, he did not keep count of them.

The parents of the new teacher were afflicted

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with alliteration without knowing the name of the disease. They had called the new teacher Henry Horace Hillary Hopkins. In consequence he spent a large part of his life writing his four H's in every conceivable manner. John soon saw that Hopkins was a poor substitute for the old Clinton. He knew very little, and was not sure that he knew what he knew.

It was so easy to bully or hoodwink him, and there was so little risk in performing the usual pranks that school life was robbed of its chiefest charm for most of the boys. There was not even the entertainment of seeing some one whipped.

But John easily forgave these weaknesses for the golden privilege of sitting in the warm schoolroom and studying all day long. He made rapid progress, and by frequent aid from Elkanah ("Uncle Elkanah," he had told John to call him), and by unfailing attendance at his private pine-knot school, John was regaining swiftly the ground his previous years of idleness had lost him. He felt that life had again put on its Sunday best, the robe of hope. He was thrice rich in a desire, an opportunity, and a motive for hard work.

One morning in December he woke at daybreak to find that a heavy, wind-driven snow had altered the geography of the region, filling hollows to their brims, blurring fences into long white mounds, burying the old roads and opening new across bald meadows.

He made an early start for school, tingling with the cold and the brisk guesswork for a path.

In time he passed the home of Silas Stibbs, whom

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he brought forth with a sickly whistle from his chapped lips. Silas looked on the snowdrifts with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Gosh all hemlock! but this here snow's come just in time. We couldn't 'a' stood that fool Hopkins another week. We'd 'a' hed to dump him on the hard ground fer lack of even dead leaves. But — well, sufferin' corn-meal! won't he look gee-lorious stuck head first in one of these here drifts — with his big clodhoppers wavin' in air o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

John's heart flopped over in his breast.

"Look here, Si, you fellers ain't a-goin' to throw out this here teacher, too?"

"Us fellers! What's the matter with you? Ain't you in on the picnic?"

"No, I ain't. I've gotter git an ejication somehow, and git it quick. I want to study."

"Well, I'll be hornswaggled!"

By the time John had finished pleading his point of view, Silas was converted, even if not convinced. His thick, lump-headed nature had yielded a certain superstitious deference to John's inherent authority from the first.

The plot had been laid and hatched at a party, to which John had not gone because he had not been invited — not being in Society. Silas had entered into the conspiracy largely because some one had said that John would be sure to agree to it.

Physically, Silas was a giant; mentally, he was a parasite. His dependence on John was that of the mighty shark on the traditional little pilot-fish. As soon as he heard John's cogent reasons for keeping

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Hopkins in, the plot to put Hopkins out struck him as the most outrageous nonsense.

On the way to school many other banditti were met; a few of them were won over by John and Silas; others declined to forego the fun.

The athletic Bob Wainwright was the leader of the anarchists; he would not be won over. As his father had the largest farm in the county and his sisters were pretty, he had the usual following of aristocracy.

At the morning recess, John found his party in the minority. The best he could do was to secure a postponement till the day's session was over. He spent the rest of his leisure in electioneering. Some he bribed with eloquence, others with an offer to do toilsome chores for them. One he gained by promising to electioneer for him in the coming contest for the presidency of the debating society. A desperate case he won over by desperate means — he gave him his precious jackknife.

He sent notes all round the school, and when Hopkins caught him in the act, and, unsuspicious of what he was doing, rebuked him scathingly, he made no defence.

Hopkins' frequent fits of coughing gave John a motive above his selfish hopes; he felt that a struggle ending in a cold snow-bank might endanger the teacher's rickety constitution. But plan and plead as he would, John could not get a majority to his side.

"It's a case of fight," he whispered to Silas. Silas looked happy at the thought, and word was

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quickly passed to the anti-evictionists to clear for action.

Bob Wainwright's men rushed out of school at the first sound of dismissal. They rendezvoused behind a snow-drift big and white as a new cottage. The schoolgirls went past, then turned and loitered anxiously, to watch the struggle, shivering with blissful horror.

At length, when the expected Hopkins could surely delay no longer, and the ambuscaders were all impatient to gather him into their hospitality, they were startled by a rain of snowballs. Then with wild Indian war-whoops John charged them at the head of his small but impetuous band. Volley after volley of snowballs shook the Wainwright ranks, which, lacking ammunition, could make but feeble response. Some of the men broke and ran for cover.

John, Silas & Co. tackled the remainder, and there was soon an indiscriminate series of wrestling matches throwing up clouds of snow-dust. Silas brought down two or three men, and set lighter men like paper-weights over them. Then he brought down two at once and held them.

John and Wainwright had a battle royal till one of Bob's men came to his rescue, and had John on the four points of his back; but, down though he was, he clung fast to his two assailants. The captive kept the captors captive.

And now Mr. Hopkins appeared. He picked his way through the battle-field with disgust. Seeing John, he looked down on him with especial disapproval, noting how he had torn the coat and dishev-

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elled the elegance of Wainwright. John stared back brazenly, winked with violence, and said:

"If you know what's good for you, perfessor, you'll light out for home."

Mr. Hopkins sniffed danger and beat a dignified retreat, surrounded by the girls, who cherished him as a brand from the burning. Only one of them all lingered to see the outcome of the fight. The others looked back at her with disapproval of her power to endure calmly the scene of violence.

But Lucy was waiting to see if John needed any help. Once the object of the war was out of sight, a truce was soon agreed on. It was less difficult now to persuade the malcontents to let Hopkins stay out the term.

Wainwright moved forward to walk home with Lucy. But she deftly avoided him and walked home with John. She was as flushed with pride as the five o'clock of a summer morning.

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XVII.

WHEN John told Mr. Elkanah Tew how he had recruited his forces, Elkanah exclaimed:

"John, you're a born politician."

The boy looked crestfallen, and said:

"But I fought when I had to."

"Then you're a soldier, too. Once in a coon's age, you meet a man who is both a schemer and a slugger. You want to keep your eye glued on him."

Now that he was launched on the new seas of ambition and education, John began to take the tiller of his life firmly into his own hands.

When there was school he went to it with religious fidelity. At nights he worked at Latin and mathematics and general literature, with Elkanah's occasional aid, and by means of his library.

When there was no school, he worked at anything that could bring him money, in the fields, in the village, at home. No task was too hard for him; no rate of exchange for brain or brawn was too high where money was the result.

He was growing, too, like a hickory sapling. It was evident that he would never be handsome, but he began to take thought for his appearance, and to plan his sentences as if they were little orations. He did not grow pedantic or stiff in his speech,

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save for a little while, until Elkanah could discover his affectation and scarify it. But he ceased to speak the slovenly dialect of his fellows.

His mother, whose admiration of him increased, without loosening the grip of her love upon him, began also to preen herself a little, and to take care of her words, and to read a little. She wanted to be able to keep pace with John's mind.

As for Jim Mead, he was learning, too, unwillingly. He had vented his spleen on John once too often. The father had not noticed the little day-by-day growth that had gradually made of the helpless child a powerful young man.

One night Jim attacked his wife. John interfered. The father turned on the son. There was a horrible combat that lasted until neither was able to lift hand against the other.

The next day Jim found solace in raw whiskey from a near-by illicit distillery in which he did occasional work. John found hope in practising boxing and wrestling with Silas Stibbs. The thought of striking his father was the most loathsome thing John Mead could think of, save one; and that was, the thought of seeing his blessed mother struck.

For a month or more Jim was willing to leave the physical supremacy of his family undecided. Then one night at supper he took umbrage at some speech his wife made. He struck at her across the table. He missed her, but rose to pursue her. He ran upon his son, who had risen in front of her.

"Stand outen my way, you cub. You dursen't raise your hand ag'in' your own father."

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"Dad, we've had one terrible scene here. I'd give my right hand not to have it happen again. But you mustn't hurt Mother."

"Mustn't, eh? Mustn't? Who's boss here, you or me?"

"You are, so long as you do what's square; but you mustn't ever strike my mother again."

"More of your mustn'ts, hay? Well, I'll show you." And he let drive a blow that might have felled an ox.

But John's head was not there to receive it. He had dodged just enough to escape the fist without losing ground. When Jim Mead's body followed his fist into space, John embraced his father with more than filial ardour, pinioning his arms to his side. Then, with a quick side step, he threw his father across his hip and laid him gently on the floor.

"Don't hurt him, honey," John's mother interceded, fearing to find in the son some of the father's ferocious cruelty.

"Leave him to me, Mother. He won't get hurt unless he hurts himself."

It was a long, long while before Jim Mead's curses ceased to flicker round the walls; then he called on the other children to come to their father's aid. He did not know in what hysterical joy they were watching the downfall of the tsar.

At length, when neither struggles nor oaths, nor threats to disown, to kill, to send to jail for assault, nor invitations to a fair, square fight had taken his son off his chest, Jim surrendered and promised solemnly to try to be a good father and husband.

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How much credit was due to fear, and how much to genuine repentance, it would be unkind to say, but Jim actually did his best, and almost succeeded in being negatively endurable. Of course, he continued to give to drink a regularity he denied to work. But wings do not grow on shoulder-blades in a day.

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SECOND BOOK

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I.

BY the time John was twenty he entered the little schoolhouse, not as a pupil, but as a teacher — at the magnificent pay of fifteen dollars a month — and found. There was no attempt to throw him out.

The pupils were as lazy in study and as industrious in mischief as ever, but John's arms were long and his shoulders very broad, and he had made a speech that disconcerted and disorganised the mutineers.

He never lost a chance to make a speech. He had said:

"Fellows and girls: I was once a boy myself. I'm going to try not to forget that. I was once a student in this very school. I know just how you feel. I helped throw out a teacher who was unjust, who punished without cause and without mercy. If I do either, please throw me out. But somebody has to teach here. The school has to be kept open. It is my business to teach you as much as I know, to make you study as hard as you can be made to study, to make life as pleasant for you as possible, but above all to see that those who come here to learn are not interfered with by those who come here to fool. The mischief-makers have just five minutes to pack up their useless books and get out. If they stay they'll find it very uncomfortable here

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unless they study. I gave them a fair chance to go. — As nobody moves, it is evident, then, that we are all here to work. That is very pleasant. There is nothing that makes life as pleasant as a little work between meals. We will begin with a song to set things right — the 'Star Spangled Banner' — all sing!"

Then he led off with a sonorous voice. There was as little friction in the school as was humanly possible.

But the success he had here was not the success he was looking for. To overawe a small congress of girls and boys was not John Mead's goal. He would be a lawyer.

Every night he pored over the huge and heavy legal works of Blackstone and Co., which he had borrowed. Saturdays he walked the miles to Darrville, where Judge Orme, a successful young jurist of five and thirty, quizzed him, and set him to copying legal papers, searching titles, and doing multiplex legal chores.

Did I say that he read law every evening? It was true, but misleading. Certain evenings he read law in the eyes of beauty.

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II.

JOHN called with all rural formality on the various belles of Darrville and the country near about. But he always found himself looking forward and backward to and from his visits to the Darr homestead. Lucy was his calendar, and he dated everything from his calls on her, and from her moods.

As John was flitting from flower to flower, tasting and testing the charms of each; so the queen-rose Lucy was receiving the attention of all the butterflies and moths, and comparing their colours and graces.

The most gorgeous of all was Bob Wainwright. He was stalwart to see, graceful to watch, and pleasant to hear. He sang all the latest songs — and all songs were late reaching that frontier of art.

Bob was plainly impressed with Lucy; the Wainwright and the Darr estates adjoined, a marriage would be a consolidation of wealth and power as well as a partnership of great promise. The parents of both urged, with discreet restraint, a match, and it was a proverb that the two would marry in due course of time.

The thought was torment to John, but he had no effective resistance to offer. He had neither home nor hope to give so well-reared a girl as Lucy. But still he lingered patiently about, held by Lucy's cordiality and her strong fascination.

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One night, when he was particularly lonely for a little dialogue with her, he found Wainwright there ahead of him, seated in his favourite chair and making himself odiously attractive with geniality and anecdote.

John sat in a corner, feeling and looking an allegory of misery, dumb and shamefaced jealousy. He felt that he could find a deal to say to Lucy when Wainwright was gone. The trouble was, Wainwright showed no sign of going home first. His friend John hoped to see the bankruptcy of his rival's wit, but Wainwright seemed to have an endless fund to draw on.

The duel between the two strugglers for the same girl had plainly degenerated into a mere question of staying powers. Lucy discovered that she was the victim of a tug of war when the time gradually drifted past the usual hour for ending calls.

At first she thought it very laughable, and had much difficulty keeping her face straight till Bob got to the point of his stories; then she laughed more than the jokes deserved.

Gradually Lucy grew more and more serious. The game of freeze-out began to chill the air. She grew dull and sleepy. She had trouble trying to smuggle her yawns under cover of a laugh or an exclamation.

At length she rose and went out of the room to fetch a plate of apples, glossy and flushed, and a jug of amiable cider. The men drained the cider and finished everything but the skins and cores of the apples. And still stayed.

Lucy had been away to boarding-school and Bob

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had gone East to West Point, and much of their talk was of a life that John could only envy in ignorance. Their gossip was like technical language to a layman. But though he neither contributed largely to, nor largely understood, the conversation, still he stayed.

At length Lucy looked more than ever uneasy, for she heard steps on the floor above and knew that her father and mother were going to bed. Still the rivals lingered.

The ceiling frankly reported the unmistakable, home-hinting thuds of shoes being dropped on the floor above. John and Bob grew desperate and very open in their mutual disapproval, but still they stayed, while Lucy's eyelids grew as heavy as the eyelids of a bronze statue of despair.

The two dogs might have been there yet in their opposite mangers, had not some one appeared to cut the Gordian knot. The fall of the shoes had been succeeded by a dead silence ominous to Lucy. Then from the dark recesses of the upper hall came a gruff voice which they recognised as the angry roar of Colonel Darr:

"Lucy, you come up-stairs and go to bed; it's half-past ten. How long do those cubs intend to stay there? — for breakfast?"

Without further delay John and Bob left the house, feeling like schoolboys whipped and sent home.

Lucy was too tired to cherish much indignation at her father's share in rescuing her from a vigil that threatened to have no end.

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III.

IN late July the Stibbs family — who were not very religious — gave a dancing party to break the monotony of the hard hot toil in the fields, and the weary stupor of the evening rest. A few stayed away because of churchly scruple, but John was not of the orthodox. This time he was not forbidden to go by lack of clothes or abundance of poverty. He had not many dollars between himself and nothingness, and his best suit was a poor enough affair; but he had enough withal to get him safely, if not brilliantly, through the simple festivals and humble pomp of that region.

If I said that he wore his clothes with grace, I should make Truth jealous of Fancy. John had shabby raiment, and wore it to its worst possible advantage.

When he was in his ordinary garb you looked up at his lofty and characterful face. When he was in his "Sunday-go-to-meetings," he was nullified into a mere clothes-horse on which some one had flung certain still ungainlier draperies.

But even at that it took John so long to make his natural plainness ugly, that on the night of the party, when he entered the room, every one was engrossed in those harmless games by which the prudery of the country people smuggled in a vast amount of hugging and kissing.

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Engrossed as all the youths were, however, most of them found time to pause and take in the spectacle.

" He looks just like an umbrella! " said some one.

A few girls giggled, and a young buck or two made comments whose courtesy was as wanting as their wit.

When John mingled in the fun, he was too tall to be lost from view. Among the loutish farmer lads he was still preëminently awkward. When they all sank into chairs, in the intervals between games, John was still conspicuous. Let him sprawl as he would in a chair, his head was still high, — looking like a mop with its brush of hair on the long, lean neck, — and his knees were as sharp and as hard to navigate past as Cape Hatteras.

When he spoke, however, he was no longer the victim, but the commander of the laughter. Village Sheridans and farmyard Artemi pelted him with jokes as with clods; he dodged them or sent them back with fatal vigour. His stories were almost always pat, and were told with an authority over laughter as sure as the pull with which a magnet fetches splinters of iron.

Lucy was there that night. Bob Wainwright beau'd her. He owned a colt he could ordinarily drive with one hand. The accomplishment did him no good on this occasion, for the heavy rain that had fallen all day had made the roads into mush; and it took skilful, watchful driving to arrive at all through the dark.

John had picked his way over the treacherous miles in a pair of boots. He had carried a pair of shoes in his pocket; they had been polished to the

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last degree of darkness made visible. So large a surface of so lustrous a black is rarely seen on the human foot. When people tried to make jokes on John's feet, he would answer, solemnly:

"Well, hullykewhiz, if my legs hadn't been turned up pretty far, I'd be so durned tall I'd break in two."

To-night John is the especial target and bull's-eye of rural wit. The short-sighted — among them, the Informer — shoot jokes at him in the vain hope of gaining by his discomfiture; a few altruists — among them, Silas — feed him their efforts for the pleasure of the improved wit they get back.

Certain hair-trigger humourists, who always went off prematurely in explosions of laughter that killed their own stories, envied John the ability to keep the room in a roar without betraying himself into more than a preliminary snicker, which he quickly quenched in his palm as with a candle-snuffer.

"John's a reg'lar undertaker of a joker," said Silas.

But to-night it is easy for John to keep a straight face. For all his hilarious broadsword practice, he is deeply sad at heart. He is thinking through it all how beautiful, how beyond his hopes is Lucy; he is confessing bitterly to his heart that Wainwright is very handsome, and that he wears his clothes so that they are both adorning and adorned. He feels that on the drive hither Wainwright inevitably attempted to kiss Lucy. He wonders feverishly if she accepted the salute — he dares not even wonder if she repaid it in kind. His eyes, wandering restlessly over the crowd's one smile, are not seeking to

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coerce laughter; they are trying to keep from staring fixedly at Lucy as if to see if her cheek shows any staining blush from Wainwright's kiss.

John was always willing to create and enjoy a laugh at his own expense. In spite of his solemn ambitions and his boundless hopes, he was always to himself one of the greatest jokes in the world. He grinned helplessly at his own awkward faults; when he was about to sink into despondency at the fruit of his mistakes he could almost always laugh himself back into sanity. Did any one ever go mad who could laugh himself to sleep and grow brave on a chuckle?

"I don't like to brag," John was saying, "but I guess I can make a fool of myself in more ways than anybody else this side the Atlantic. It's the only kind o' versatility I've got." He proceeded to recount a few instances of his genius for making himself ridiculous.

It was a circus to the crowd. It was like watching a clown fall over his own feet. John's solemn eyes roved with delight the distorted faces of those people who never feared to laugh too loud. He was surprised to see that Lucy alone did not smile at his predicaments. Her look was one of polite pain.

At first thought John was hurt. On second thought he was rejoiced. Perhaps Lucy did not enjoy his mishaps, because she — but no, the idea was too heavenly to come true on earth. None the less it gripped him so that his voice lapsed into an abrupt silence.

"Wake up!" somebody sang out.

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"What did you say?" John murmured, through the haze of his reverie.

"Go on and finish your story," said Wainwright, to whom John's confessions were especially pleasant hearing. "What happened next?"

John brought his hands briskly down on the arms of his chair.

"I forget the rest. What's the use of so much talkin' when we might have an 'Old Dan Tucker.' Lucy, will you dance with me?"

Lucy's formal "With pleasure, John," was musical with a tenderness that also made the sparkle of her eyes strangely, limpidly gentle.

Old Dan Tucker is Sir Richard de Coverly come out in the West. Lucy went through her paces with a gracious stateliness that made her divine among the boisterous tomboys about her. Her womanly grace found its masculine complement in the lithe agility of Bob Wainwright; but she, all perverse, found something even more beautiful in the benign, though graceless, homage of John Mead, beaming on her from on high.

The dance was gone through with such tempestuous energy that all the couples made a rush for the cool outer air, and stood on the porch fanning and whispering till they were called in to choose between Drop-the-Handkerchief, or Blindfold, or Pussy-wants-a-corner. John looked appealingly at Lucy. She saw his wish and made it her own.

"I'm too tired to go through another romp just yet. Would you mind staying out here awhile longer, John?"

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When he answered, his voice trembled, not alone with gratitude for her tact; in it hope quivered, too.

The other couples crowded back into the house, and their shrieks of laughter and heavy tread shook the windows. The noise jarred against the huge, rich chord of music the ensemble of night was sustaining.

The dismal day had ended in a rainbow, its serenity fading in a sunset that made the West one great glowing fireplace. The night found never a cloud to veil its dark splendour. The stars glittered as if new-washed in the rain.

The night had appealed to the hearts of all the couples, but the garden path was so soft and the grass so wet that they had hastened back indoors to find consolation in conundrums and lamplight merriment.

But the mystery was too fond for John and Lucy to shake it off. The laughter from within was only a vexation. When at last John said:

"Seems as if All Outdoors wasn't big enough for me to breathe in to-night; let alone this little porch. What would you say, Lucy, to walkin' out there to the fence, where we could see all the stars, and take a long, deep breath?"

Lucy thought of her thin little pink slippers and of the damp ground. She thought of them just long enough to deserve not blame for forgetfulness, but credit for even this little sacrifice, this little risk, to avoid the greater risk of denying John the luxury of a whim.

He gave her his arm. They stepped out into the night, young and open-hearted; and the old night

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took them into its mystic hospitality. They paused in the full shower of starlight.

At length John said, very softly:

"Lucy, I wish that — that every single one of those little fellows up there stood for an hour — for a minute with you."

Lucy had no answer, but her hand upon his arm fluttered like the pulse of fear, and her head sank upon her breast. And when he moved farther from the noisy house, she hardly lingered; her hand did not leave his arm.

As they reached the tall gate-posts, his head, turned as it was toward her, went deep into a climbing rosebush. No thorns resented his intrusion, but he shook down upon the hair of Lucy, limp petals of roses and drops of scented rain. As he breathed deep of the perfume, John's arm left Lucy's side and stole around her waist. She looked up in shy yet expectant wonderment. And he kissed her.

Her lips, though they trembled under his, did not shrink from their fervour. Rather, they lingered there.

A moment of rose-bowered paradise for both. Then Lucy remembered her stronger self. She glided from his arms and exclaimed, or rather wailed:

"John, John, you have no right to kiss me."

He made a step toward her, and said, "Then give me the —" He was going to say "the right." But he also had a stronger self. It took command of him again. He remembered in a flash all the reasons he had so long and bitterly pondered that

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forbade him to hope for, or deserve, the heart of Lucy.

He had no home to offer her. He had wild dreams of future wealth, but he could not see a tangible sign of it this side of the horizon. He could see a long hard road, all up-hill. It led to the horizon, and he imagined that, over the edge of that rim, there might be Eldorado. But by the time he could reach a point even where he could see how false or true his hopes were; by that time, reckon it as he would, Lucy's youth would be gone. Suppose she loved him enough to wait, then suppose that after all the long, long, empty-armed, weary-hearted patience, he found that success were not for him after all.

He would go over to the Great Majority of those that have failed, but he at least would have had the joy of trying. Lucy could only suffer the purgatory of waiting. It would be untrue to the sacredness of his love to sacrifice her heart to it. Better, sacrifice his own heart and spare her the torment.

It was familiar ground for his thoughts. They had paced it as the hungry lion patrols the row of iron bars. He had settled it all long ago. He had resolved a great white resolve of self-immolation.

And now all his strength had melted in the blindness of night, in the aroma of roses. He struck his fist savagely into the shrub. Now the rain was cold upon his hand, and the thorns tore his wrist.

To Lucy he said, not "Give me the right," but "Forgive me! You are so beautiful, I — I — we'd better go back. You'll take cold."

As they re-entered the dim light of the porch, John

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saw on Lucy's cheeks, tears. He thought of the rain on the roses, and groaned aloud.

Now the couples poured noisily out of the house again. They found Lucy standing in a shadow and shaking — with laughter? And of course they joined in, as John drawled one of the funniest stories they ever heard him tell.

When Wainwright drove Lucy home that night, he found her in so grave a humour that even he did not dare attempt a frivolous embrace.

As for John, he put on his boots again, gruffly declined all offers of a ride home, and walked the long, muddy miles to the dreary log cabin. If the pools he splashed through, the mire he scorned to avoid, the brambles he ripped past when he crossed the field, had only been real obstacles! If he could only have found a short cut to Success on the other side of the long hill!

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IV.

DESPAIR has always an appetite for diversion. John's mind was too active to sink into abject despondency. His grief for the hopelessness of winning Lucy was deep and abiding, but it was not a luxury he cherished as do many natures that fairly fatten on disappointment and purr over sacrifice; wallow in it as if it were catnip.

"If I was to go moping round and telling everybody how blue I am," John confided to Elkanah Tew, "I'd be like a yaller dog telling the moon how poorly he is. He says he's sad, but you can tell by the way he keeps it up that he's tickled to death to be so miserable. Now the more I think about Lucy, the more I talk about the blessed girl, the worse I feel; so I won't talk about her, and I'm not going to think about her oftener than I can help."

It was not a thoroughly divine policy, but it was the effort of a sound mind to keep itself sound. Once, a man in the pink of health declared that he could turn off his thoughts as easily as if they were water and his will a faucet. But John was not this man; try as he would, John could not entirely exorcise the vision of Lucy, and he debated again and again the wisdom and justice of his unselfish determination not to spoil her youth by a long and dreary engagement.

He had seen too many young girls grow sallow

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and forlorn, waiting for the success of their plighted lovers, only to marry at last in despair. They grew dismal and slattern, betrothed to hope deferred; and grew wrinkled and bent as the wives of failure realised. It was the regular tragedy, the annual tribute of young maidens that civilisation pays to the dragon of necessity.

John vowed, therefore, not to ask the hand of Lucy, or any girl, till he was ready to place a wedding-ring on that plump hand and lead it to a home where it would not grow lean and rough with work.

Bitterly hard he found it, though, to treat Lucy with mere courtesy, and to be almost the only one at the picnics and festivities who held no girl's hand in the twilight and hugged no waist in the moonshine.

The temptation to propose to Lucy, to trust to some invisible luck to make him rich before he died of old age, grew stronger and stronger. The look in her eyes almost maddened him; the remembrance of the kisses stolen under the rain-sprent roses parched his lips with thirst. Her ghost walked by his side in the woods or the lanes, and he reached out his arm and clasped to him the thin air that resisted hardly less than Lucy had resisted his arm that night. That night!

But as fire drives out fire, so temptation, temptation. Just as John had decided that nothing on earth was so all-important to his welfare as the clover-blooms of Lucy's red lips; just as he determined he could no longer put off calling on her; just as he entered the parlour of her father's house,

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he found the straw of diversion despair always seizes.

When he stalked up the steps of the porch and knocked, Lucy's mother came to the door. The Darrs were well enough off to have a "hired girl," but callers were so rare that admitting them was a privilege to quarrel over.

Mrs. Darr said that Lucy had seen John coming and had gone to her room to "tidy up a bit."

Meanwhile there was a visitor. Hush! you can hear her singing. She sings like a nightingale. She comes from Virginia. Her name is Alabama June Muir.

John thinks he has heard the name before, but cannot place it. Mrs. Darr whispers to him that the girl's father was at West Point with Colonel Darr. They fought in the Mexican War together. And now Colonel Muir has come all the way to Darrville to visit his old crony. Mrs. Muir died a year back, leaving a young and purty daughter. That's her a-singing now.

John listens to the song with delight. He does not know what classical music is. Fortunately; for out here it would only be a hopeless appetite, assured starvation. He loves the rural tunes the folks thereabout sing with their ragged, illiterate voices. The song he hears now with complete joy is the most foolish of all the fool songs of that place and time. Superlatives can go no further.

By and by the old melodeon ceases to puff and wheeze, and the pure voice of the young girl ceases to purl and flute. Mrs. Darr opens the settin'-room

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door and ushers in John, introducing him with a great flourish.

Instead of freezing up with the shy reserve usual to the strangers John had met, the singer rises, willows into a curtsey, glides forward like a dream in a vapour of fluffy skirts, and offers him a hand that is like a palm-full of warm petals.

And the vision says, with the winsomely unctuous accent of the Southern voice, irresistible as Circe to the Northern heart, "Good evenin', Misteh Mead. Ah'm right glad to meet you. Lucy has been telling me such a lot of nice things abo't you. Ah'm sho' yo' eahs must have buhn'd all day."

His ears are certainly burning now, for his whole face is on fire. He has just presence of mind enough to repress the idiotic giggle that bubbles up in him; he has not enough to let go her hand. She is too courteous to draw it away. At last he sees that he is clinging to the seraph for dear life. He lets her fingers slip from his in a strangely comfortable embarrassment.

And before he knows just how it all happened, he is seated next her on the haircloth sofa, her eyes are twinkling him into hypnotic bliss, and he is venturing compliments with a rashness that would have been treated as an insult by a Northern belle newly met. The Southern beauty takes them as the proper tribute of ingenious gallantry to womanly charm. To the right-minded beauty, respectful praise even from a stranger, is only the rendering unto Calphurnia of the things that are Calphurnia's.

John is eventually amazed to hear himself saying such things as this:

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"I'm not in the habit of attending church regularly, but I think I'll have to go next Sunday."

"What fo', Misteh Mead?"

"Because when I see a girl — a lady — as — er, as — as beautiful as you are — not that I ever did before — but when I see a very beautiful woman I always want to stand up and sing, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow!'"

And he did stand up, and sing it, or intone it, or trombone it, in his great, sonorous voice. But he collapsed on the last note. For in walked Lucy.

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V.

LUCY saw at a glance that her delay had not left John unentertained. Strange to say, she did not feel entirely grateful to Alabama for her hospitality.

John's eyes widened with admiration at Lucy's stately grace; but they narrowed with unction as he studied Alabama's beauty — beauty that even jealousy could not overlook.

They speak of a gourmet smacking his lips over some appetising viand. As John revelled in the delicacy of Alabama's face, you might say that he smacked his eyelids.

A blind man might have called John handsome, because his voice was either commanding or cajoling or caressing as his mood went. And he had presence. Men with all their eyes used to call him the ugliest man they ever saw. John admitted it himself. He would say:

"My face hurts me so much I can't sleep nights without a poultice on it."

He used to tell on himself a distorted version of the old story credited, like all old stories, to poor Abraham Lincoln:

"The way me and Silas Stibbs got to be such friends was on account of a vow I made once. I happened to look into a glass real hard one day. The scales fell from my eyes. The looking-glass

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curled up as if it had the stummick-ache. I said, 'It's a sin to commit suicide, or I'd go jump in the crick,' says I. 'It wouldn't be a sin, though, to kill anybody that's as homely as I am — if I can find a mortal so unlucky.' The next day I went fishin', an' met Silas Stibbs.

"Says I, 'Silas, say your prayers, you've got to go,' I says. 'What for?' says Silas, being of an inquisitive turn of mind. 'Because you're homelier than I am, and I'm jealous,' says I. 'Am I? Honest?' says he, lookin' sort o' wild. 'Honest!' I says. 'Then push me in,' says Silas. 'Tell Maw and Paw it was their fault, not mine, and put on my tombstun, "Here lies the humliest man God ever let live; he died repentant. Reader, go thou and do likewise."' And with that I shoved him in the crick. But the crick couldn't stand for him, and he couldn't drown to save his life. 'Oh, Lord, what'll I do?' says he. 'I can't afford to live if I'm homely as you,' he says. Says I, 'Come down by the mill-wheel,' says I, 'it's deeper there.' But just then the dinner-horn blew and he felt hungry. And after dinner he felt so good he began to think he was a prize beauty. And he's thought so ever since."

Silas was, indeed, far from the Greek ideals of proportion. His little head sat upon his broad shoulders like a small knob on a big gate-post. His face was round, too, and his tiny features were all awry. His friends said his face had "curdled" in a thunder-storm.

John's ugliness, however, was of the generous and expansive type. Of features he had a plenty. His nose was large, and his mouth was large, and

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his jaws and his ears were large; but, by the same token, his eyes were great, and his brow was broad and lofty.

"If that scalp-lock of your'n was the Statue of Liberty," Elkanah told him, "your head'd look like the dome of the Capitol down to Washin'ton."

And so, because his face was built large and set high, women called John handsome, in spite of all the derision of the men.

And so Alabama found him curiously attractive, though his Northern manner was backwoodsy and his speech was all gnarled as compared with the speech of the Southern gallants she knew.

Alabama had two other reasons besides this for cultivating John's interest. In the first place John was the most picturesque of the alien people she was marooned amongst, and it was her nature to do the best she could with any material that fell to her lot.

In the second place, she saw that Lucy was deeply in love with John, and he with her. What better reason could the minx want for interfering?

After this first meeting there came many another; Lucy was not always present. The days went by with a fierce joy for John. He would say to himself:

"She's only fooling with me. What fun can the filly have yoked up with a hulking old ox like me? But anyway, it's fun for the ox while it lasts."

He never dreamed of marrying Alabama, or asking her to marry him. After a while the nightingale would fly back South to the balmy paradise of Virginia, where she belonged. Marriage was a serious

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matter. Meanwhile, here was the most exquisite witch he had ever dreamed of. She had Viola's charm with Puck's mischievous heart working in her like yeast.

She was one of those women whom to think of was to find yourself smiling. John grinned when he met her. Their communion was one long laughter. He went home chuckling.

It was not that she said anything especially worth while. If you put her sayings in a book of epigrams, people would tell you you were mad or hypnotised.

But if they had seen and heard her quips as they came living from her mesmeric mood, they, too, would have shaken with strange amusement at every sally, for the way her dark irises darted to and fro, the way her very nostrils seemed to wink, the way one little segment of the red rainbow of her upper lip lifted to give you a peek at her white teeth, oh, those ways there was no resisting. She was archness incarnate; she was the living definition of magnetism.

For all her mischief there was nothing unwholesome about Alabama. John's thoughts of her were always gay and pink. He wanted to caress her, to say pretty things to her, to hug her lightly and delicately. So all of her lovers thought of her. They loved her with delight, but not with passion. Her fragrance was not that of the poppy, but of spring blossoms; her heart was not a pomegranate, but a cherry.

Even Lucy, whom her presence tormented, could not hate her. If Alabama had seemed to love John, Lucy could have surrendered him almost without

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a pang, knowing how happy the Southern enchantress could make him — if only she loved him.

But Lucy knew that Alabama could not care seriously for John. Lucy would never have spoken to John about his infatuation, never have warned him against it, for she feared that her motive in speaking might be misread into a petty envy. To belittle herself in John's mind would have been a desperate step indeed.

But she did not care what Alabama might think of her, or how she might misinterpret her, if she could only protect John's heart from a hopeless entanglement. So her frank soul drove her to tell Alabama just what she thought of the flirtation. She spoke without priggishness or patronage. She came at once to the point.

The two girls were combing and braiding their hair one morning. The night before they had met John at an "apple-peeling," given at the home of the Wainwrights.

Lucy had strained every nerve to conceal the pain she felt at seeing John so blissful in Alabama's presence. Various gossipy maidens and matrons had taken Lucy aside to bewail John's infatuation. To them she had declared that Alabama was the sweetest girl in the world, and that she was only too grateful to John for helping entertain the visitor. Every word of the pious lie was a drop of blood from her heart, but she spent it with a beaming look of truth.

Yet now, alone with Alabama, she felt the need of candour. Her mood was as frank as the clear light of the morning.

"Alabama," she began, gently, "do you love

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John Mead?" The peal of laughter this question evoked was answer enough. She went on:

"Do you want him to love you?"

"Ah want everybody to love me," said Alabama, peering out between two long strands of hair.

"I think everybody does love you," Lucy was large-hearted enough to confess.

"You don't — for one," Alabama pouted.

"I do. I love you dearly," Lucy answered, with such gentle truthfulness as shamed Alabama into giving her a kiss of apology. Then her mischief returned.

"But you love John Mead more, don't you?"

"I am very fond of John, of course," Lucy answered, frankly.

"Are you going to marry him?" quizzed Alabama, turned cross-examiner.

"He has never asked me. I am sure that he never will ask me. But that is not the question. I am too fond of him to want to see him unhappy, or to see him checked in his career. He has a great career before him, I am sure; if he is not hindered too much. But he is terribly poor; he has had a long struggle to rise to where he stands to-day; he needs all his strength, all his heart to rise higher — out of this wilderness into a broader field. He has no time, no heart, to waste. To fall deeply in love with a woman who would distress his mind, keep him from his work, become his chief ambition — and then grow tired of him, laugh at his devotion — or, at the very least, go away for ever and leave him alone without help or comfort, that would — in the first place, it would break his heart, and as I say,

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it would add another wound to his poor, big heart — already covered with scars. It would give him one more unsatisfied hunger of brain and heart. Worst of all, it might check the wonderful impetus he has now, and he might never have the courage to start again. Just a trifling whim of a beautiful girl might condemn poor, noble John Mead to live out his days in this miserable old wilderness."

Lucy was quivering with fervour she could not express. Alabama had turned away, and was gazing out of the window. The view from that window was not inspiring. After a silence, she said:

"How eloquent you are, Lucy."

"Ah," gasped Lucy, impatiently, "if I were really eloquent you wouldn't have said so, or thought of the word. I am simply very, very, very earnest. My heart is set on John's success, his welfare, and his happiness."

Alabama's only comment was a dreamy:

"How beautiful it would be to be loved as you love John."

"You can have John love you like that by simply turning your hand over. And if you would love him in return, if you would stay here and marry him and be with him winter and summer, in poverty and in defeat, as well as in hope and work and success, I would do everything in my power to bring you two together. But you don't love him. Your lives and sympathies are worlds apart. You will go back in a few weeks to your Southern friends whom you sympathise with and appreciate. What good can it do to win a few weeks of insane devotion from a man whom you will only dazzle for

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a while and then leave and forget? You will go back to make more conquests, but he will stay here dejected and broken and ruined."

Tears were pouring down Lucy's cheeks, and impatiently as she shook her beautiful head, she could not fling the tears from her lashes as fast as they flowed there. She turned her back and stood before the opposite window, her tears and her emotion blinding her to the scene before her.

So the two girls stood, looking in opposite directions, and opposite-minded. Alabama was thinking harder than usual. Her fingers paused at their deft interweaving of her hair. After awhile she said, slowly and very seriously:

"Ah reckon you're right, Lucy — you always are. John is too good for me. He doesn't really care for me. He only thinks he does because — because Ah'm a new toy from another part of the world. Ah won't flirt with him any moah. Ah'm going away soon, and he'll forget me, and realise how much better you are than any other gyirl that ever lived. And you're twice as good-looking as Ah am, too."

By this time she had gone to Lucy's side, had turned her round, and now kissed her on each cheek. Then the two girls had a good cry in each other's embrace.

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VI.

THAT night there was to be a "play;" what we should call a house-warming. Jake Strother, a farmer of thirty-five, had at length found money to pay a first instalment on a piece of land, and a usurer to advance him the rest of the money in return for a mortgage that bade fair to keep many generations too busy paying the ruinous interest ever to disturb the principal. Having at last found somebody who would accept him as a slave in return for a house and a small second-rate farm, he had decided that it was time to marry Hannah Scammon.

"I be'n a-sparking Hanner," he said, "cluss onto fifteen year — engaged ever sence I was twenty-five and she was — well, she ain't tellin' her age no more. Hanner's birthdays 've struck a snag."

Even the rural poet, whose obituary verses added a new and posthumous terror to death, and whose epithalamia caused a distinct falling-off in marriages — even he could not write a poem — or, as he modestly put it, "invoke the Muses" — for that wedding. And yet Hannah was a "blushing bride" — in fact, her colour led one to fear for the safety of the inflammable material of her pathetic wedding-gown. And Jake was an impatient groom.

He looked very much the groom. And his hands were so big that he told the parson he didn't believe

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he could hold anything so small as a wedding-ring, which he tried several times at the wrong moment to jab on Hannah's thumb. When the couple knelt, the four staring soles of their audibly new shoes were so expansive that the parson had to rebuke the audience for laughing aloud "in Gawd's haouse."

But he got them safely married, and everybody was invited to the house-warming. The men of the region had assisted at the house-raising some months before. Such a bleak little shanty it was to sell one's soul for; to take one's bride to — after fifteen years of waiting! And the gawky hostess, who had all a girl's shyness without a girl's youth, had been the prize beauty of the region when Jake Strother first entered the race for her hand, and cut all the other fellows out!

Lucy was used to such scenes. Alabama found them painfully amusing, then so deadly wearisome that in sheer despair she began to flirt with Bob Wainwright, who had brought Lucy over behind his swift thoroughbred, leaving Alabama to come in the carriage with Lucy's mother and father and her own father. John was late in coming. When he arrived he brought such a fund of good spirits that the heavy drag-chain seemed to slip from the wheels of the whole affair.

During the "refreshmunts," consisting largely of doughnuts and pie, apples and cider, there came the timid spatter of rain on the roof. Then a shower galloped over, like stampeded sheep crossing a bridge. The fury ended in a steady drumming that had an all-night sound.

The men, looking very glum, had gone out to put

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the covers on their motley vehicles. It soon became evident that there was nothing to do but make the best of it, and go home one and all through the rain.

The bride and bridegroom invited any one that wanted to spend the night in the new house to stay. But the invitation was not so whole-hearted that any cared to accept it, though one or two snickered as they declined.

There was a noisy farewell, a series of quick dashes and scrambles for shelter inside the dark and glistening buggies and dugouts. Lucy had suggested that John ride back with the family. The rain was reason enough for accepting. And then, Alabama was there. As Mrs. Darr — always the last to get away from a place — put on her wraps, she decided that she could put John on the front seat with her husband, who drove.

But Colonel Darr and Colonel Muir were just in the midst of a fierce argument on the subject of the admission of Kansas into the Union as a free or a slave State. So they insisted on sitting together. Mrs. Darr then planted herself on the back seat between John and Alabama. She was glad for once to be fat, for thus she kept Alabama and John well separated. And so they drove away.

As John let down the thick rubber curtain that shut them into utter darkness, his last look saw Hannah and Jake standing in the doorway, watching their guests away. Hannah held a lamp in one hand, sheltering it from the wind with the other. The light streaming up into her face painted it in luminous colours of happiness; over her shoulder it

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lighted up the face of Jake, who stood with his arm around his Rachel. It was a pleasing tableau, if not exactly pretty; and John wondered if he would ever have a home of his own.

Once the curtain fell, it was dark as doom inside the carriage. The road ahead was black and muddy, and the light that did not come from outside was further shadowed by the two bulky colonels in front. Their word-war, the garrulous chatter of Mrs. Darr, the equally momentous prattle of the rain, the splashing of the horses' hoofs, and the shirr of the wheels in the slushy road, made up noise enough to prevent the dead silence of John and Alabama from being audible.

At length, in order to keep both legs from going to sleep, John shifted his position slightly, and to balance himself put his arm on the back of the seat. By chance his hand fell upon Alabama's nearer shoulder.

She did not shrink from his touch.

After a pause of wild excitement, in which his heart beat as if he were going into battle, he softly slid his hand along the back of the seat and laid it on Alabama's farther shoulder. The shoulder was warm and soft through the coat it wore; but this shoulder recoiled from his touch no more than the other.

At length, after more insane hesitation, John ventured to pat Alabama's arm tenderly — you might say, quizzically. There was still no resistance.

Grown very bold, he raised his hand, and taking the lobe of her ear between his thumb and forefinger, he tweaked it gently, as Apollo pinched the

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ear of Horace. It was like the calyx of a midsummer lily to his touch. With fingers that trembled in spite of him, he softly stroked the girl's peachy cheek. He would have sworn that he could feel a red blush thrilling it.

All this time Mrs. Darr had been running on about the way various women's dresses had been made, or made over, or dyed, and about the ingredients omitted from the doughnuts and the pies. All this time Alabama had been remembering her promise to Lucy, remembering it with fluttering heart and keen anguish that only heightened the delight she took of John's caress. She knew she ought to resist, that merely to shake her head in mute rebuke would check John's ardour.

Yet somehow — just somehow, when John's palm on her cheek began to persuade her to him, she hardly held back at all, but leaned to him in the dark — the triple darkness behind Mrs. Darr's broad back. And when his lips pressed silent kisses on her cheek, she could not help — at least, it seemed as if she could not help — lifting her hand to clasp his, and finally turning her face and taking his kisses (it was so dangerous that they hardly dared be more than half-kisses), full on her red lips.

John closed his eyes in utter rapture, and on the inside of his eyelids was a moving kaleidoscope of all colours imagined and unimagined, glowing in lavish pageantry.

So the two tasted the sweets of stolen fruit while the unheeded rain frantically babbled their secret in its unintelligible speech, while the friendly wheels kept saying, "hush-sh-sh! hush-sh-sh!" and the

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horses, feeling that blind Cupid was equerry, nibbled at each other's manes playfully. But still the two colonels wrangled politics, and good Mrs. Darr rattled on about the science of doughnuts.

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VII.

LATE that night, when John stumbled into his home, late and bewildered, his manner was so strange and his look so distraught that his mother, who had been waiting up to give him a good-night kiss, felt a sudden shaft of fear that he was after all the son of his father — that she had at last reached the crucial time when she had seen her adored son under the spell of liquor. John was drunk, but not on the wine of grapes. When he woke the next morning he was no soberer.

But the days that followed were busy days of long walks to town and hard work there at the law-office of Judge Orme, preparing for the final examination of the next week. He was sorely troubled, trying to lay out in order in his mind the muliform intricacies of the Law.

Judge Orme had been very majestic about the sanctity of the Law in the previous two years of study. He had for it that reverence all jurists gain, in spite of the power they know it to be for the protection of evil and the postponement of good. But now toward the last, the Judge told John a few secrets:

"The Law, my boy, is like a big black curtain, and the ordinary mind can't see past it or find a hole big enough to poke his little finger in; but to the lawyer who knows his business it's as thin as a

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woman's veil, and when he wants to he can always find a place where he can drive a horse and wagon through it."

Troubled enough John was, trying to understand the warp and woof of the mesh, but he was almost more troubled trying to map out his own duties and wishes. There had been a certain dismal satisfaction about laying aside the plan to marry Lucy. It had been bitter, but it was the iron tonic of altruism that leaves a sweet after-taste in the mouth and makes the soul strong and sound. The flirtation with Alabama was like the unfermented grape juice. It was very sweet to the taste, but afterward it gave no comfort.

His motives, formerly all unselfish, were now all selfish, ruthless, short-sighted. They threw an unpleasant look on his previous sacrifice, and made it seem petty and unreal. He was finding such comfort under his freedom from responsibility to Lucy that it no longer looked honest. Selfishness and unselfishness were so tangled in his motives that he could not tell which from t'other.

It was not till Sunday afternoon that he found a chance to call at the Darrs' again. As he walked up the lane to the gate, he heard the distant murmur of an angry speech. As he reached the gate he saw old Colonel Muir standing on the porch and storming at the burly slave Dan, who was trying to appease his master's wrath.

As John opened the gate, the Colonel, shaking his white curls rabidly, exploded in a final volley of rich red Southern curses, and brought down his

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heavy walking-stick with all his power on the negro's woolly head.

It was the cane, and not the head, that broke.

The Colonel went back into the house with a last roar of fury at the loss of a faithful crutch, hardly more wooden-headed than the negro, who stood rubbing his moss-grown pate, more in sorrow than in pain.

"Good Lord, Dan!" John exclaimed, "I thought he had cracked your skull for sure."

"Ho, ho, don' you worry 'bout dat, boss," the darkey chuckled; "many's de time Ah've gone out in de sheep pasture and had a buttin'-match wid one of de ol' rams. De ram gin'ly complained of a tech of misery-in-de-haid, next day."

"But how can a great giant like you let an old man like the Colonel beat you as if you were a pickaninny? You could wrap him round your little finger."

"Co'se Ah could, boss — but de Kyunnel is de masteh and Ah'm he slave. Don' fohget dat. You folks up hyah has funny ideas. Ah went to town to get some t'ings for Masteh yudder day, an' some of dese hyar No'the'n ge'men got holt of me an' stood me up in a corner and said et was a livin' shame to keep me in slavery. Dey says when my Masteh done bring me up No'th into a free country, he oughtn't to be 'lowed neveh to take me back no mo' to mah chains. Dey done a lot of speechifyin' 'bout chains, dough de Lawd knows Ah ain't neveh wo' none of dem da·ornyments. Dey went on scan'-lous 'bout de 'bloody lash' — dough de Lawd knows Ah'm neveh whipped 'less Ah needs it. Ah'm so

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stupid an' so brack Ah cain't always 'membeh or think fast, an' Massa nach'ly gits a teny mout onpatient. Ah sut'nly am sorry 'bout dat nice cane o' his'n."

John shook his head in perplexity. Seeing is believing — usually, not always. Negroes find it necessary to talk even when they are alone; an audience is a luxury not to be missed. As John put one foot on the step of the porch to knock at the door, Dan detained him with a question.

" 'Scuse me, Masteh Mead, but mout I ax you a small question about two 'spressions dem ge'men kep' a-usin' an' a-usin' t'otheh day? What is a Fuginive Slave Law, an' what has det 'ar Dredful Scott decision got ter do wit' a common or'n'ry niggeh like me?"

"The Fugitive Slave Law, Uncle Dan," said John, "is an iniquitous return to the days of barbarism; it not only allows a man like Colonel Muir to keep another man like you in slavery, but it says that if you try to run away, I, who believe slavery a curse, and, what's worse, a ridiculous parody on our free institutions, I, by the Lord, not only must not help you to get free, but, by the Old Scratch, I must, if called upon, help the bloodhounds to run you down. The Fugitive Slave Law is a law making every free Northerner the servant of any Southern slave-holder. And the Dred Scott decision — why, I'm downright ashamed to tell you what it is. It is the latest sublime absurdity of slave logic. Judge Taney says that a slave is not a human being, but a chattel. By the great hornspoon, it would be the funniest joke ever cracked, if it weren't the

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most damnable tragedy ever written! But the play won't run long, I can tell you. It won't run long."

The passion for oratory in John had lifted him up on the stump unconsciously. He forgot that he was talking to an old and blinking negro; he thought he was on the rostrum at the debating society, or making some of the political speeches he had already begun to be known for. His eyes were eagle-like, and his left arm was swingeing the air, while the right hand nestled oratorically between the breast buttons of his coat. He was brought down from his stilts by the comment of Dan, who was more puzzled than aroused.

"So de Jedge say de slaves isn't human bein's, but only cattle? Wall, I reckon he done tell de troof. An' as fer de Fuginive Slave Law, how dey gwine get in de cotton craps an' de rice bidout us niggehs? An' how dey gwine git dem niggehs to wuk bidout whippin' 'em now an' den? Dey's jes' like oveh-growed childe'n, niggehs is! An' dey run off up No'th hyah sho's eveh yo' bo'n, ef dey ain't nobody fer to fotch 'em back. 'Cla' to goodness, Massa Mead, Ah don' see nuffin' wrong. De Lawd wouldn' 'a' made us niggehs an' guv us wool instid o' brains ef he wanted us to be free. An', lan' o' livin'! ef Ah was done 'lowed free, Ah don' know how Ah'd keep from stahvin'. We'd be a mis'ble lot o' coons, fer sho', ef dem Ab'lutionists done hed deir say. Yo' don' ketch me gettin' none of dem fool 'mancipation notions."

Colonel Darr had come round the corner of his house in time to hear John's peroration, but had stepped back unseen. There was something in the

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long rolling sonority of John's voice which thrilled him, as that voice always thrilled the hearers of it, whatever the words it said.

The lazy lusciousness of the old darkey's voice brought him out of the clouds of mysterious exaltation into the cabbage-patch of amusement. He made his appearance with a broad smile. But the look on John's face was one of such harrowed earnestness that he paused amazed.

Tossing his arms with a gesture of despair, John gave him a wild look, and cried:

"Did you hear him? Did you hear the words from this man — this poor old black thing that was born a man? From his foolish lips — 'out of the mouths of babes' — comes the final word, the utmost condemnation of slavery; — that the slave himself should become so degraded, so deformed, so besotted, that he is willing to be a slave, to remain a slave; that he loves and respects his betrayers, the people that have turned mankind back to the apes; and that he grows to resist and to despise the people who would restore him to his birthright. My God, that I should have lived to hear a slave glory in his slavery! Colonel Darr, this can't go on. We can't permit our great, good Republic to be turned into a polluted factory of monstrosities with the shape of men and the souls of worms. We can't let the South turn the Land of Liberty into a breeding-pen for slaves!"

A scornful voice behind him drawled, "Well, what are yo' goin' to do abo't it?"

John had paused, trembling with excitement, all his self-control shattered by this unforeseen explo-

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sion of the feelings the thought of slavery had been crowding and packing into his heart for years. He had not seen Colonel Muir, who had been called from his rocking-chair by the loud voices. But he turned at the cynical remark which the Colonel had puffed out contemptuously after a long stream of cigar-smoke, while the stupid cause of the quarrel shuffled away from the playground of the lightning. At the same time from an upper balcony leaned Lucy and Alabama, blanched with excitement, as Roman girls at the arena.

John said to Colonel Muir, with all the deference he could muster:

"What are we going to do about it, sir? What are we going to do about it? Colonel Muir, you are an elderly man, a venerable gentleman. I respect your personality as greatly as I abhor your politics. You gentlemen of the South have had it all your own way for this first half-century of the Republic. The Northerners have talked and sighed and wailed and hemmed and hawed and ended always by veiling a pitiful backdown under the name of compromise. But, Colonel Muir, there's a new generation coming. We've got a sense of humour, for one thing, but we can't quite enjoy the ghastly joke of putting up that first sentence of the Declaration of Independence as a sign-board over a shop for making slaves. And we like the Declaration a blamed sight better than we like the slave-business. The sentiment for emancipation, which you have despised and which the North hasn't taken seriously, has been growing and growing just the same. If you would put your ear to the ground you'd hear a real storm

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coming that will make the little teapot-threats of your slave-holding, secession-howling orators sound like a tin whistle in a tornado. You ask what we are going to do about it? Well, it's hard to say. But when we get good and ready, and when we do what we're going to do about it — Colonel, you'll never know what struck you!"

Colonel Muir almost bit his cheroot in two with rage, as he snarled:

"You damned Abolitionist!"

No one is so polite as the Southerner when he is in a good humour, and no one so blind when he is in a rage. Almost the opposite holds true of the North. John swept off his hat with a bow, and laughed:

"Colonel Muir, I thank you for the compliment, and for the sake of your white hairs I overlook the tone of it. I am as you say an Abolitionist, and I'm proud of it. And as you say, What are you going to do about it?"

The mere word "Abolitionist" was to the Southerners of that day what a red-ribboned banderilla is to a Spanish bull; what the avowal of atheism is in a church; what the Hunnish name of Attila was to an Italian convent. It meant pillage, rapine, anarchy, all in one word. At this hateful name, Alabama left the window with a gasp of disgust. As for Colonel Muir, he could hardly speak, he was so choked with rage. He stammered incoherently at John's placid front, then turned on Colonel Darr, and roared:

"Darr, turn this insolent cub off your premises!"

Colonel Darr was heartily fond of both of the disputants. His greater friendship was, of course,

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for his old comrade in arms; but his sympathy was with John's fervid creed. He paused in helpless regret at the collision. Then the Southerner stormed at him:

"Darr, if that cursed Abolitionist stays here, I leave; by the Lord, I will!"

Colonel Darr looked to John, and murmured, deprecatingly and pleadingly:

"Better go, John."

"Certainly, Colonel; sorry to have put my finger in a hornet's nest," was John's cheery reply. And he turned slowly toward the gate, only to whirl back sharply as he heard the clear, commanding voice of a woman crying:

"No! John shall not be sent away from our home. He has as much right here as any one. I am an Abolitionist, too. And who's going to drive me out?"

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VIII.

IT was Lucy's voice, of course, and as John stared up at her, the blazing wrath in her eyes gave him a curious shock of joy.

He had not quite recovered when he saw Alabama at her father's side. She had hurried down just in time to hear Lucy's avowal. She took her father's arm, and said:

"Come, Fatheh, dear, we'd betteh pack our duds and go back to Virginia. Ah think we've worn out ouah welcome heah, and Ah know we can't feel at home among people with such peculiah notions. Come, Fatheh."

As she led her trembling father into the house, she held her head so high that when her scornful backward glance swept over John she seemed to look down upon his six feet four of height.

John met her scornful glance with a look of admiring amusement. Then he looked from Lucy to her father, and found each of them staring at nothing in a daze of perplexity; he bit his lip in chagrin.

Into this silent sea burst Mrs. Darr like a full-rigged ship. She had been superintending the dinner in blissful regions of peace. She hailed John with a cheery:

"Howdy, John; hope you've come to stay for

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dinner. We've got red ras'b'ries with thick cream, and huckleburry pie."

"Thanks, Mrs. Darr, not to-day. I've got to eat humble pie to-day. Lucy, can you ever forgive me?" He pleaded upward, and she beamed down on him in all graciousness,

"You have no apologies to make, John. I'm proud of you."

Even poor old befuddled Colonel Darr shook John's hand warmly, and said:

"Don't worry, John. It had to come. I've held in so —— —— long myself I was liable to bu'st loose any minute."

And John went through the gate, shaking his head smilingly at Mrs. Darr's tenacious, "Better stay to dinner," and waving his hat in farewell to Lucy, whose eyes followed him as far as they could.

But all the way home the one thing he remembered was the witchery of Alabama's scornful glance.

John's fears that peace would not be patched up between the Darrs and the Muirs, were justified the next morning, when he looked up from a law-book in Judge Orme's office, and through the window saw the Darrs' carriage rolling past. Inside it were crowded Colonel Darr, his wife and Lucy, and Colonel Muir and Alabama — all wearing a look of grim amiability and of violent carelessness. After them followed a wagon, containing Dan and other articles of personal luggage.

Slapping his book shut, John seized his hat and hastened to the station. As he neared the little plank

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shanty that served as a sort of larger hen-coop for the passengers, he saw that, while the women stood together in a group and glibly talked of nothing, the two white-haired colonels paced the platform in a mood of common uneasiness.

When one looked one way, the other looked another. Each seemed to try to seem nonchalant. They had the air of two boys who have had a quarrel. But in their case, the fun of the situation was embittered by the fact that they were ancient chums, that they were at odds, not on personal grievances, but because their well-tried love was sickening under a miasma of opposing creeds.

Their sections, their parishes, their heredities were wedging them apart. The little contest over John Mead was only a detail, though it began the estrangement, and though the two men had not since spoken cordially; the Southerner making haste to take the first available train, the Northerner unable to say the most formal words of mechanical hospitality to detain him.

All their uneasiness, their helpless alienation was seen in their manner, even to John's distant eye. As he approached, the two men paused and looked off into space. There was a haggard loneliness in the gaze of each. Each was dying to each, and the eternal farewell was a gall of mockery.

Now, out of the distance, came the whistle of the coming train. Far away as it was, it seemed almost the wail of a despairing soul.

The two old men started, then quivered before its cry. Colonel Muir was the quicker to speak, only because he was the more lightly pivoted on impulse.

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His tremulous hand groped out into the darkness that seemed to surround him. He found the hand of Colonel Darr, and those two right hands, comrades in war and in peace, seemed to embrace. The left hand of each man rested on the right shoulder of his friend.

"Mah boy; mah boy," groaned Colonel Muir, "we can't separate like this afteh all these yeahs. Ah neveh had a brotheh that Ah loved as Ah've always loved you."

"Harry! Harry!" was all Colonel Darr could say.

"It looks as if the So'th and the Nawth would have to part company. But" — the old man tried to smile, and his smile was the final touch to his agony — "don't let's allow a little thing like the bu'st-up of the Union to come between you an' me and ouah lifelong affection foh each otheh."

Colonel Darr wrung the boon hand yet harder, and tried in his turn to smile.

"You and me, Harry, have got so addicted to sort o' leanin' on each other that — well, we won't live long enough to break off the habit."

Then they began to quaver, "God bless you's," as the train came lumbering and roaring into the station.

John, who had paused a moment to speak to Colonel Darr, had felt himself an intruder on a sacrament, and had tiptoed past.

Mrs. Darr and Lucy were beamingly cordial to him, but Alabama gave him a look of icy disdain. He only smiled at her mood, and when the train drew up, seized her hand-bag and gave the little

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peak of her elbow a lift as she climbed the steps of the car. He found her a place on the shady side, turned back a seat to give her double space, and showed Dan where to bestow the Colonel's valises. Dan, whose deference to John had suffered a marked collapse since the day before, hastened back to get his master aboard safely. John stood looking down at Alabama, not so much devouring her, as tasting her with his eyes — as an epicure sips a rich and luminous Madeira.

Alabama avoided his gaze as long as she could. But the thought that she ought never to let a prisoner escape, the thought that she might secure a very justifiable revenge over her ex-hostess Lucy, and, perhaps more than either, the vague authority of John's presence, led her to smile, then look up at him with a twinkling eye. Without a word both began to laugh heartily. The conductor's gruff "All aboard!" the clangour of the bell, and the jarring of the train calmed them. She offered John a hasty hand-clasp, and said:

"You ah an awful heathen now, Misteh Mead, but Ah still hope foh yo' convehsion to the Southe'n gospel."

"If the South would send us more such missionaries as you —" he began; but he did not have time to finish the gallantry. He hurried to the platform, and swung lightly to the ground.

Colonel Muir was standing on the lowest step, waving farewell. He was so distracted with grief and so blinded with tears that he waved his hand and bent his gaze in the wrong direction.

That was his only evil; his heart was right, but his eyes were turned the wrong way.

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IX.

LUCY and her mother drove back home in the carriage. Colonel Darr had certain business in the village. He took John's arm, and leaned heavily on it. They walked some distance along the creaking board sidewalk in silence. Then Colonel Darr, shaking off his loneliness with an effort, said (omitting the harmless necessary profanity that besprinkled his speech):

"John, I had a long and stormy scene with Colonel Muir after you left yesterday. We separated just now in all the old friendship we have always known, but he told me some things yesterday that were not cheerful to hear. He says the South is determined to end this eternal bickering, this everlasting contest over slavery, by seceding once and for all. They won't listen to any more concessions, and they're sick of compromise. They think they have every constitutional right to break the Republic in two, and that we ought to tell them to go in peace and take our blessing. But they are preparing to fight if necessary — and to fight hard and scientifically."

"Bah!" grunted John, disdainfully, "they talk too much. 'Barking dogs don't bite.'"

"Mebbe they don't bite just while they're barkin', but sometimes singin' makes 'em hungry. Let a tramp go past my place at night, and my four watch-

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dogs will out-yelp the church choir; let that feller climb over the fence into my yard — there won't be enough of him left to feed a canary. Those Southerners do a lot of talking, as you say; but they're right smart with a pistol, too."

"What can the South do against the wealth and population of the North?" John asked.

"What can a platoon of policemen do with a mob? Colonel Muir tells me the South is organising. He tells me that men are drilling everywhere throughout the South, and arms are being gathered, and stores prepared."

John broke in, impatiently:

"Are those fire-eaters crazy enough to think we're going to let 'em split the country in two, and tear the flap into strips, without saying a few words to the contrary?"

"It is easy to say a few words to the contrary; but as to doing anything to the contrary, what can we do when we come right down to it, and what have we got to do it with? How many men have we in our regular army? Not enough to do the scouting for such a war as we must wage along the tremendous southern frontier. Why, that frontier is thousands of miles long, not counting the seaboard. We've got to have whole divisions and corps of volunteers. What does the average American know of soldiering? You could chuck it all in a mosquito's eye and not make him blink."

"That's so," said John, meekly. "I don't know the difference between a company and a brigade. If we had to fight now they've certainly got us where the hair is short. But what can we do?"

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"There's just one thing to do: organise. And at once. I lay awake all last night fretting over it, and with the morning came the solution. Somebody's got to begin. I ought to use the experience I've had. So I'm going to organise a company right here in this county."

"Great!" cried John. "That a great idea! May I join?"

"You must. We shall want every able-bodied man. Especially, one that can shoot as straight and think as straight as you. I thought that you'd be a good man to act as recruiting sergeant."

"Sergeant! Why, I don't know the first thing about drilling. I'll be the greenest hand in the awkward squad."

"You can soon learn all you downright have to know. Too much drilling is worse than none at all. I'm coming to town to-morrow, and I'll bring you the book of tactics. Meanwhile, you skirmish round and get fellows to join."

"All right, Colonel. Well, here's my office." And he pushed out his hand. But Colonel Darr, as if not seeing it, briskly raised his own hand to the visor of his cap in military salute, with a sharp "'Morning, Sergeant!"

John, half-amazed, half-thrilled, straightened like a ramrod, imitated the Colonel's salute as neatly as he could, and grunted, "'Morning, Colonel!"

He looked almost handsome in his unusual erectness, as he turned on a military heel to enter his office. But as he whacked his lofty head against the low door-ledge, he laughed and relaxed.

None the less, as he sat poring over Judge Orme's

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law-books, the lines of type that marched under his eye were all files of soldiery hurrying to some great rendezvous. Then when he shook his head to reform his thoughts and looked blankly at the wall, the steel engraving of Blackstone changed strangely, till the severe face of the old lawyer melted into the mischief and beauty of Alabama, and the rigid wig that framed his ancient face became the prankish curls that clustered round her young smile.

So love and war teased him as he strove to cram his mind full of legal facts enough to get him through the examination. On the fatal day they still haunted him and kept him on the anxious seat, till the examination was over, and the board of three lawyers had praised him for his knowledge of the law and his brilliant shrewdness and conciseness of reply.

Just once they caught him napping, when in a preliminary quizzing on his general information, they asked him what was the richest State in the Union.

He answered "Alabama." Then he corrected himself, and nobody knew why he blushed so red, or why he kept his brows so tightly knotted over the other questions.

As John's mind relaxed in ill-concealed joy over his success and the happiness it meant for his mother and Lucy, and the enforced respect it would bring, perhaps, from one woman, the old lawyer broke in:

"Before you go, Mr. Mead, I'd jest like to ask you one more question. S'posin', Mr. Mead, John Doe devises Whiteacre to his relict, contingent remainder to issue of Richard Roe. Said relict

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remarries, and her husband is committing waste upon said estate. What action in restraint will lie in favour of Richard Roe, who is engaged to be married?"

Everybody leaned forward to hear John's reply to this poser; everybody fell back amazed as he answered, dreamily:

"The command would be, 'Right front into line, double quick.'"

The guffaws that followed woke him from his dreams of tactics; he explained in confusion:

"I — excuse me, sir, I was thinking of the drill manual."

The lawyer, who was a virulent Abolitionist, made the clown a hero by the accolade of one remark:

"And a damned good thing for a Northerner to be thinkin' of these days."

The neighbourhood, having little to talk about, gossiped over John's examination, and laughed over his two slips. No one saw anything except a careless blunder in his "Alabama" answer — no one till it came to Lucy's ears. She did not smile over it at all, but suddenly donned the look and the pallor of tragedy. And then she set about rearranging her dreams, and refurnishing her future on a new plan. John Mead played a small part in that future — the part of a casual friend, less valuing than valued.

The neighbourhood gradually forgot John as a lawyer, since no cases came his way. When they talked of him at all, it was in connection with the new military company — "the Darrville Blues,"

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they called themselves, though John thought the "Mongrel Motleys" would do as well, for there were no uniforms at all, and the muskets were such as each man owned or could borrow.

Colonel Darr, who had certain political influence in the State, was pulling all the wires he could find or attach, to persuade the Governor to order uniforms for the company from the State funds.

The Governor was fertile in promise, but sterile of performance.

"That Gov'nor," John told Colonel Darr, "is like some of these here cows that come home at night so chock full of milk they can hardly moo without frothing at the mouth; but when it comes to the point and the pail is waitin', they seem to forget just how to let go. Colonel, the only trouble with that Gov'nor is, he won't give down."

So the Blues drilled without uniforms, and when the novelty and the fun wore off, their discipline, their attendance, and obedience went from worse to worst.

Colonel Darr was sore put to it to enforce the rules. He could not be severe in language, because the victim of his severity would simply resign, and there were not enough men as it was; he had no irons and no guard-house to put the men in, and he was in despair. He had delayed appointing any commissioned officers till he unearthed some one of especial merit.

It was evident that John would be first lieutenant, but who was to be second? And who could replace him as orderly sergeant? There was no regularity in attendance, no regularity in keeping the line, in

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stepping off when the command was March, or in coming to a stop when the command was Halt.

One evening, after a wild burlesque of drill, the Colonel was saying:

"John, it's no use; we might as well give up. I have no authority, and, without the strong hand of discipline, it is only waste of time to drill men. I'm going to disband the company. It's too —— bad, too, because I was intending to make you my first lieutenant."

The men walked on in silence, the Colonel restless with humiliation; John, with ambition. At length he found courage to say:

"Too much modesty is sometimes like keeping your mittens on when you've got to write a letter to a girl. Colonel, excuse me if I come out bare-handed, and say that I believe that if you would kindly let me have a whack at that company I could do something with it. I'm on a little different footing with the fellows from you."

"Lord bless you, my boy, go ahead. Napoleon said that you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs; well, no more can you make it without beating the —— yolks into shape."

The next drill evening, the Colonel called his men to what they variously supposed was the position of Attention, and said that he was going to give Sergeant Mead a little practice as officer; other men who showed ability would be given trials later. The Colonel then seated himself on a tree-stump and awaited developments.

When John stalked out to the centre and faced the line, a ripple of laughter ran along it, as a wind

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along a scraggly hedge. Some of the men chuckled aloud, none of them so uproariously as the largest man on the line — a German emigrant named Heinrich Schimmelpfennig. Behind his back they called him "Pig." One or two who accidentally used the latter term in his presence had been embellished with numerous black and blue spots for their memory's sake. To his face he was deferentially called "Dutch."

John's scornful look sobered most of the smaller men, but "Dutch" laughed louder than ever. After a short pause, John spoke, bearding the man with the dangerous nickname, "Pig," — the German calmed in an instant — "Pig, you look more like one of your native sausages in a high wind than like an American soldier. If you've got a touch of the ague, fall out and go home."

"By tam, I don't fall owid, and I don't go home, too."

"Let me tell you right here, that if you don't obey orders, either you'll fall out or you'll be thrown out."

"Ho, ho, ho," — he was laughing again, as largely as Jupiter, — "me opey you! Dot is too mooch reetickalousness for vorts."

"Do you intend to act according to the rules of discipline or don't you?"

"To hell mit your dizzyblines."

"All right, that makes things easier for me. One of the first rules of discipline is that an officer is not to strike a man. Since you don't recognise that rule, we'll just lay it aside till I teach you some of the other rules."

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Without further parley John flung himself on the amazed German, upset him, trundled him along the ground to the fence.

When the stupefied Heinrich rose to his feet in a daze, John struck him in the mouth, and as his head went back, caught him by the feet, and with a great hunch, heaved him over the fence as if he were a sack of potatoes. Heinrich lay on the ground as inert and as graceful as that same bag of potatoes for some time. When he came back to consciousness his brain was buzzing like a swarm of bees, and when he was calm again, there were leaves in his boot-tops and clods in his eyes, and a corn-cob down his neck, to be removed. Then there was a long pause for elaborate German meditation on a plan of future operations.

John's overthrow was largely the result of suddenness of attack. Heinrich was the best wrestler of the district. He wrestled at county fairs, he wrestled two men at a time. John, who had the next best reputation, could never be coaxed or nagged into wrestling with Heinrich. He preferred to smile and admit his inferiority rather than confess it with the German perched triumphantly on the pit of his stomach.

But it was evident that the issue could no longer be evaded. There was something to fight for now besides the empty homage of the rustics. Ambition, the Muse of John's life, was hanging behind the burly form of the German. It was necessary to overthrow that form to reach her.

He felt that Heinrich was too much befuddled to trouble him before the drill was over.

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Meanwhile there were the waiting, wondering recruits. In putting them through their paces, he could plan his battle with Schimmelpfennig. He went back to his post, and cried:

"At-*ten*-SHUN!"

There was a new alacrity about the response, though the awkwardness was as of old.

"Men," John said, "you're supposed to stand in a straight line; you look like a rail fence. Right dress! Eyes to the right, there. Come up in the centre; not so far. Step back, McCrullis. Come out, Tourtelotte. Take in that stomach, Trauernicht; you bulge so you hide Proudfit from view. Push out that chest, Spinola; I can't tell whether you're goin' or comin'. There, that's better. Ah, you look almost like human beings. Front! There are a few things you men want to remember. In the first place, you've enlisted, and you can't get out; leastways, not without fighting your way past the recruiting sergeant. In the second place, every man that is lazy or stupid not only makes a blithering jackass of himself, but he makes all the rest of you look foolish. The fellow who goes to sleep or who tries to be funny only makes it necessary for every one of you to do something all over again and again. If I were you, I'd take such a man aside after drill and punch his nose for causing you extra work. In the third place, the sooner you learn the few mechanical things, the sooner we get to real battle exercises; the deeper you get into your heads the idea of doing instantly and without question what is told you, whether you think it's right or not, the sooner will you be sol-

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diers, and not simply gawks. And you must remember that if the war that is threatening from the South really comes, and if we men go to fight, — as we surely all will, — then the thoroughness and the speed with which each of us learns his lessons here in this field will make all the difference between winning a great victory or running like sheep, between coming home with a band to meet us or sneaking over the back fence; and very often it will mean the difference between coming home to our mothers and our best girls, or staying there on the battle-field for keeps. So let's get to work and learn something."

Then he set about explaining the various duties. His experience as a school-teacher helped him to lay out the a-b-c of soldiering to these overgrown six-foot infants. His strength and his innate authority helped him to coerce those who were lazy or unwilling.

At the end of the exercises the men felt that there was some sense in drilling, after all; Colonel Darr went home feeling that there was a hope for his company and for the North; John felt the nameless joy of running that complex machine whose cogs and bands and levers are men of various minds and manners all welded and rivetted and hinged together, to be managed by one throttle.

Instead of hurrying home after falling out, the men lingered to see what finish there would be to the Schimmelpfennig affair.

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X.

JOHN had been devoting one corner of his brain to wrestling out his other problem. By the time the drill was over, he was grim and ready.

Heinrich had also planned out his campaign in elaborate detail. The sight of the men marching and countermarching had kept him from approaching John. He had looked on with a sort of awe; then the thought of overcoming the man who directed all this action grew doubly dear. He came toward John as Cassius might have accosted Cæsar.

"Chawn Meat, you have me over de fence geknockt. By tam, I can put you on your shoulter-plates tree dimes mit gongussion, if you ton'd be too pig a gowart to wrestle fair."

"Herr Heinrich Schimmelpfennig, you are the champion wrestler of this county. I have never pretended to outwrestle you; I have never even tried. I don't intend to try now. If you want to come back and drill with the company, I'll wrestle you for fun some day when I'm not too tired or too busy, and when I feel my oats. If you interfere with the drill, though, or if you bother me now, I won't wrestle with you, fair or foul, ornamentally or otherwise. But I'll fight you to the finish, and I'll knock about six teeth down your gullet or die tryin'. Better not fool with me, Pig, I don't feel sportsmanlike to-night."

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Heinrich could not let go his dreams of conquest so easily. He swooped down on John like a landslide in the German Alps. He proposed to make it a wrestling match whether John willed it or no. But John's arms were long, and his fists were quick and tough. While his lean body dodged the German's fond embrace, his fists played a tattoo on the fat head till the bees of confusion began to simmer and buzz again.

Then John slipped, and fell full length backwards. Heinrich flung himself prone to crush him, but found himself only embracing a heap of leaves. John had squirmed and rolled away, and was already perched on Heinrich's back.

The German rose like a bridge, and flung John off; but John's fist landed behind Heinrich's ear and sent him sprawling. Again and again he was put to earth. John would not strike him while he was down, and even allowed him to rest on all fours and recover breath; but the moment the German was up he was down. The only time he was safe was when he was neither up nor down.

Twilight had dissolved into gloaming, and gloaming into the starlit night during the contest. And now the fighters were only shadows, black ghosts who breathed in great gasps and fought an unearthly fight before spectators of another world. The moon rising on the scene made a grisly radiance on the sweaty forehead of John as he leaned against a fence, looking down pantingly at the panting German, whom he advised, with unusual earnestness, to give up and call it off.

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"Vat apowid der trilling?" half sobbed the exhausted Heinrich.

"You acknowledge me as your superior at drill," John suggested, "and I'll acknowledge you the champion wrestler of the world."

With that a truce was reached; John helped Heinrich to his feet, and the men leaned against each other while they shook hands.

After that the drill went merrily on. Officers were elected; John was made captain by acclamation, Colonel Darr preferring to act only as adviser. The increasing strain with the South led the Governor to give Captain Mead power to requisition Headquarters for uniforms, knapsacks, muskets, bayonets, tents, and ammunition. In harmony with the fashion of that time, they dressed as Turkish Zouaves.

The company spent a week in camp, and John, devoting only an hour a day to formal drill for discipline's sake, devoted days and nights to learning and instilling principles of sentry duty, scouting, advance and rear guard work, battle formations, charges and retreats, and, above all, to practice in shooting straight and estimating ranges.

At last the South amazed the North by doing what it had been threatening for years. Certain States seceded, and nobody knew what to do except cry "traitor."

"That man Buchanan," growled John, "has a spinal column about as stiff as a yard of macaroni. Abe Lincoln is the man the South's afraid of. Wait till he gets in."

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When Lincoln got in, things seemed to remain about as they were. The South had gone out and left the door open. Nobody closed the door or went out to bring the South in. Meanwhile, as the North sat rubbing its eyes like a sleepy boy suddenly awakened, the Southerners jauntily gobbled up such strongholds as they found in their reach.

Major Anderson, U. S. A., stole out of his land fort and skedaddled into the island stronghold — or weakhold — of Fort Sumter. The Charlestonians gaily warded off the provisions that were sent to him, and made a picnic out of erecting batteries all around him, batteries to send him rations more tough than the hardest hardtack, and harder to digest. When all was ready, at the hour and date advertised, and while half of a misguided Northern fleet stood off as spectators, the South opened fire on the Flag. And, finally, down they came — those proud and joyful stripes, those lofty, gleaming stars.

And now the North woke with a roar of horror and rage; it reached for its gun. It found the musket out of date, a flintlock with the flint lost, tinder wet, the powder sparse, the balls unmelted and unrun. Across the barrier smiled the South, ready, eager, disdainful. The North met disdain with disdain, and with the very cry of "On to Richmond!" thought to raze the accursed capital of the sacrilegious South. Abraham Lincoln, the shrewd and homely saint, felt the impulse from the great common people whence he sprang, and which he summed up and exalted, as a noble tree represents and uplifts the being of its mother earth. Even Lincoln felt the pride of the North, and asked for

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the loan of seventy-five thousand men for three months!

This is not a history of the United States, its people, or its wars; it is the biography of John Mead and one or two others.

You do not need to come to this book to learn the story of the rise of the North, the ferocious joy of the response to Lincoln's call, the blissful chaos of the preparation, the part the women played in the drama, the tears, the encouragement, the toil they contributed, the sunny smiles beneath the rainy eyes of good-bye, the dandyism and bravado of the soldiers waving careless farewells with hands that trembled, swallowing strange lumps as they spoke consoling nothings, taking strange ecstasy from fife-squeak and drum-thump. They thought it was a great education to return to the primeval manhood that hid in the woods or the hollows, hunting his fellow man, and by his fellows hunted.

Colonel Darr was at once given a colonelcy of volunteers. When he went away the people presented him with a flag. It was handed to him by Bob Wainwright's pretty sister, dressed as Liberty. Her complete awkwardness and embarrassment well typified the position of the North.

She quivered out a little speech, of which the tiptoe audience could hear nothing but a thin plaintive wail. Colonel Darr tried to shake hands with her, and she began to cry, so he seized her in his arms and gave her a fatherly hug and kiss. It was hard to tell then whether the tears on his cheeks and nestling in his white beard were hers or his.

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His speech was less inaudible, but quite as unintelligible as the Liberty girl's, but at the end of it a tactful breeze, gentle as an inspiration, wrapped round him the folds of the beautiful flag. And looking out through it, he cried:

"When this flag trails in the dust, my wife will be a widow and my children orphans."

Many years after, those words were graven upon the monument they erected for him in the same square.

Of course the Darrville Blues offered their skilful services. There was an anxious while when they learned that one hundred and fifty thousand had volunteered where surely seventy-five thousand could hardly find work in teaching the South its place.

Then came the welcome order to proceed to the State camp. Some of the men were rejected by the lynx-eyed surgeons, and went home grief-crushed and ashamed, branded as physically unfit. Their places were easily filled.

John saw with dismay that the Yankee politician was as usual poking his ugly and awkward fingers here and there in the frail clockwork of military efficiency. It was whispered that John, for all his skill as an officer, was to be displaced by Joel Healy, a local politician who had a minimum of military knowledge and a maximum of political push.

One evening, as John sat before his tent fagged with the day's drill, the weariness of his body took the mental form of deep discouragement. He knew, or felt he knew, that his captaincy would be taken from him. He sickened at the thought of how his hopes had ripened and flushed like golden apples,

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and now were to fall thudding to the ground and turn putrid. He found some tonic in the resolve that he would reënlist as a private and force his way to the top again.

His heart sank again as he thought that the war would be too short and too easy to give ambition a real chance. Then he saw the colonel's orderly coming toward him, carrying in his hand a paper.

"Copy of latest order, sir."

John saluted limply, took the paper, and watched the man away before he could open it. He saw the orderly pause and speak to some of his men; he saw their surprise. He read: "Captain John Mead, Company F, is hereby relieved of his command. Lieutenant Joel Healy is ordered to assume command of said company in his place, and will be obeyed and respected accordingly."

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XI.

THE paper dropped. John looked with dismal eyes at the camp he had taken such pride in keeping well policed and strict, yet happy. He saw groups of his men smoking. A rumour seemed to pass among them. They took their pipes from their teeth. They rose from their elbows and forgot their cards, as they talked together in low tones and shook their heads sadly. Then they smiled and seemed glad of something.

"The king is dead; long live the king!" sighed John. "They're sorry I'm going; they're glad he's coming. Well, I'll show 'em a lively corpse."

He got up and walked toward a squad of gamesters.

"Turrible sorry to lose you, Cap'n," sang out Ezekiel Proudfit.

"You vas a goot feller to us," grunted "Pig" Schimmelpfennig.

"Thanks, boys; I'm sorry to go," John said, spunkily.

Spinola, his Latin courtesy not quite lost in two or three generations in America, proffered the bright side:

"But our loss is your gain, sir. We are all very glad and proud."

"Proud of what?" said John.

A sudden idea seemed to pierce his vitals. He

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had the order still in his hand. He glanced carelessly at it, and read the second paragraph with a sidelong look:

"Captain Mead is promoted major and assigned to the first battalion of the Forty-first Regiment. He will report for duty at —"

First, John thought he would give a war-whoop of joy. Then he decided to rub his hand over his chin and pretend to have known it all the while. He finished his sentence.

"Oh, you're proud of my reaching my Majority, eh? Well, it means a lot more responsibility, and I'll be among strangers. Boys, I'm sorry to leave you. It is more of a compliment to your good work than to me."

He went to his tent as straight as he could go, which was not straight enough to keep Proudfit from hinting that "the Cap. had a little liquor on board."

He went into his tent, lowered the flaps hastily, flung himself on his bed, and almost swallowed his pillow to smother the yells of joy artesianing up his throat.

The next day he was to learn that, though Colonel Darr had worked for his promotion, it had not been granted John's military worth, but to the memory of a stump-speech he had made some time before, and to an epigram that had swung a doubtful township into line for the present governor, — yet less to the memory of that speech than to the hope of future benefits. Politicians are ungrateful, but not undiscriminating.

When his first spasms of delight were over, John

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rose to write to his mother, to Elkanah, and to Lucy. He would have liked to write to Alabama, but she was for the moment — for three months — an enemy, or, rather, an outlaw.

His letters to his mother and "Uncle" Elkanah were easily written. He simply let his pen run, and it cavorted and caracoled over the paper as gleefully and skittishly as a spring colt.

The letter to Lucy — ah, that took a bit of writing, a deal of scratching out, and at least three copyings.

After Alabama had gone, Lucy's charms had taken hold of John again. She was, after all, the sun of his life. Alabama was as a little red bird that pirouetted past, seeming to light up the day with a new and concentred glow, and disappearing again into the thicket.

John remembered the good-bye talk he had had with Lucy. They had leaned over the trustworthy, if whining, old gate in front of her house. Long, sweet silences, full of yearnings that could only have been expressed in kisses, in embraces, and long looks, eyes to eyes, were punctuated by short, vain efforts to talk.

It was war time, too, and Death seemed to elbow between them, grinning at them, and saying:

"Well, why don't you talk about me?"

But of serious things they could not talk. As Lucy leaned across and looked into dream-distance, John bent as close as he dared, and their voices softened with the evening. Night came and seemed to surround them with a deep wall of shadow, so that

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none might see such farewell as they ought to take. A few stars came peeking out, but they were as little speechless, wide-eyed babes, who see without knowing or remembering, and whom no one heeds, since they could not tattle what they might see.

At length Lucy leaned her back against the gate, her elbows at her side. All that John needed to do was to reach out with his right arm and take her into his embrace. The aromatic air of the evening, the voluble incense from the flowers crowded along the sides of the walk, the enchantment fuming from the honeysuckle on the arched gateway — these were spells enough.

Then he remembered. He remembered that moment of Eden under the rain-enriched bower of roses. He remembered that kiss, the only kiss he had ever gained from Lucy. He could not but contrast it with the plentiful kisses he had exchanged in the night-filled carriage with Alabama. The one kiss compared now with the many, as a great crimson royal rose enthroned on its stem contrasts with a little spicy spray of lilies of the valley. To think that the little tinkling, twinkling mischief could have seemed sweeter, more treasurable, than the glowing, enthralling, whelming beauty!

In mingled repentance and love John thrust out his arm, clasped Lucy's body to him, and sought her lips with his own.

She had been longing for this moment, dreading this moment, for weeks. She had planned, unplanned, and replanned what she should think, say, and do at the crisis. And now, when the crisis came,

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she simply parroted her old words, as she writhed away from him:

"John, you have not the right."

He clutched for her as she stood back, shadowily, a little distance from him; but she retreated further, and eluded him.

He groaned and shook his head, lifted his hat from his hot brow, and drove his fingers through his hair. And he found himself telling her his ancient thoughts.

"You must forgive me again, Lucy. I keep forgetting. There's something about you — there are many things about you that make a fellow forget everything — except — except how — how very beautiful — how very sweet you are. Of course, you know that I am one of the crowd that loves you and hangs round you. You may not know — I've never exactly told you — in words — that although I'm only one of a crowd of your lovers, I'm head and shoulders — miles above them all in the height and depth of my love for you. But there are many reasons — they are too plain to need telling — that have kept me from — from putting my feelings in words. You know them as well as I do. I'm very poor, and I may always be poor in spite of my — my willingness to work. The hardest workers seem to be the poorest of all. But even if I had a little money — or a little income, I have no home to offer you. My mother — she's worthy of anybody. She'd take the edge off the mother-in-law jokes. But my father — well, even if I could lie about poor old Dad, it wouldn't convince anybody. And my brothers — my sister, my one sweet little sister died,

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you know — my brothers are terrible good-hearted, but they're kind o' clumsy about the house. They're almost as gawky as I am. Then I've often thought that even if — supposing — just for argument — you see I'm not such a lunkhead that I think it could be true — but just s'posin' you did love me — it sounds like a beautiful crazy fairy story just to say it; but supposing you did — I've often thought to myself, 'What a crime it would be to ask her to wait years and years and years till I could get about a thousand dollars a year, and could open a little home like Jake Strother's even — and take her there' — oh, my Lord, Lucy, the thought of you in my home — mine — it — whew! let's get back to earth. Well, I've thought, 'John Mead, you big gawking idiot, if you had a million dollars a year, you might ask her to come help you spend it, just out of charity to you, but to ask a beautiful, glorious angel like Lucy Darr to give up all the luxury she was born and bred to, and take you as a poor man, and wait year after year till you could get a home for her, and then perhaps, after all that waitin', to find that the man she had waited for was poorer and uglier and more or'nary than ever — it's beneath even you to think of it.' I thought I'd like to tell you, Lucy, not because it would interest you at all, but because — well, so's you wouldn't think I didn't have sense enough to appreciate that you are the most beautiful, wonderful, sweetest, dearest, God-blessedest woman on earth. I don't want you to think I'm too big a fool to fall in love with you. I'm a good deal of an idiot, but not that bad.

"And now this here war's broke out — I'll get

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a little salary as captain. It seems a fortune to me. But what I can save won't pay Mother's doctor bills, and then the war'll hardly last the three months. So there's another soap-bubble bu'sted. And when the war is over, I've got to go to work and begin all over again the long starvation of a young lawyer. I may get killed, of course, though bullets ain't usually very discriminating. That would solve many problems for me, though it would make some new ones for poor Mother. And that reminds me of one other thing I wanted to say. I can go to battle with a clear conscience, for I've told you why I've never told you before how much I love you. And I'm goin' to ask you as a last favour to go see my poor mother once in a while. She would appreciate it deeply, and it would help her; and it would give me one more big reason for saying, God bless you for ever! Good-bye, Lucy Darr! Good-bye!"

He had reached for her hand, found it, wrung it, released it, and plunged into the depths of night before she realised that his long oration was over. She had listened in rapture to the outpouring of his love, impatient, angry at his deprecation of his own worth, ready to fling her heart into his keeping at the first word of asking, ready to promise to wait for him till Judgment Day, if need be. But, as so often, the orator's flood of speech had swept him past the critical moment. Before he had asked her for herself, before she could even have rashly proffered him her heart, he had spoken of despair, and resigned her for ever. Hope only needed to be met half way to become Truth, but he had turned his back upon it.

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In bitter distress she called his name. She heard him returning. She leaned over the gate. Their very cheeks met in the dark. To him it was like brushing against a rose. He said, sadly:

"Yes, Lucy?"

And she — brave as she was — could only say:

"I couldn't let you go without wishing you — luck and safety and godspeed. And I'll certainly take good care of your dear mother. And I'll pray very hard for you."

"You're an angel, Lucy, I — well, good-bye again, and —"

He took her hand in both of his, lifted it toward his lips, feared even to kiss her hand, and only said again, in a deep, hushed tone:

"God bless you, Lucy Darr!"

And the gloom engulfed him again. He did not know that Lucy bowed her head on the gate, and that her sobs beat faster than his retreating footsteps.

If he had known this, the letter he wrote her to tell her that he had become a major, would have been easier writing.

But in his ignorance, four letters he wrote: one exuberant with joy; one of studied modesty; one resuming the trend of his farewell to her, and doubly regretting the shortness of the war; and finally, a brief and flippant note calling attention to the alliteration of Major Mead. This, the worst of all to send, he sent.

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THIRD BOOK

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I.

IN the first battle that baptised the Forty-first Regiment, John played the sad rôle of home guard and camp garrison. Word came to Colonel Darr that a battalion of Rebel sympathisers from the next county had gathered secretly, and was about to move South and join a regular Confederate organisation. These troops were poorly drilled and equipped, and felt unequal to keeping up a separate existence. Colonel Darr decided to intercept them, and capture the whole covey if possible, or at least to scatter and prevent its moving in force. His own regiment was hardly better equipped or drilled. Only half the companies had guns, and there was not ammunition enough for all these.

But Colonel Darr said to his brigadier-general:

"No army ever was quite ready for a fight, and I never expect to command a force that isn't lacking in something necessary. But I know this country, and if you'll give me a battalion, I'll knock ——— out of those ———," etc., etc.

Colonel Darr's common, every-day speech was full of those remarks which cautious printers represent with dashes or asterisks. When he was in his calmest moods he swore amiably, and his friends and family never noticed the profanity which punctuated his every phrase. When he was angry — and he was very facile in wrath — he fairly breathed

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fire. Then his speech was like a locomotive scooting under a bridge and puffing smoke up through the cracks between the planks. He even hyphenated any long words that got in his way.

He easily secured permission to attack the band of would-be Confederates. He asked for Major Mead, and John's heart leaped at the thought, though when he learned that some of the Rebels were old neighbours, schoolfellows and acquaintances of his, it seemed that attacking them would be like shooting into a picnic party.

But luck — good or bad, as you like it — prevented John's attending the surprise-party. The very morning the battalion moved, as he was hurrying here and there through the camp, he tripped on a guy-rope, and fell with a crash on his face; his cheek struck a tent-peg, and was folded back like the flap of a pocket.

He would have gone anyway, but only one eye was open for business, and the surgeon forbade him. It took three stalwart hospital stewards and two special commands from Colonel Darr to hold him down till the battalion got away from camp, and the hills shut off the teasing music of the fife and drum corps.

Colonel Darr played hide-and-seek all round Robin Hood's barn trying to find the Rebels, but at last caught up with them. He chased them till they were cut of breath and feared their own lungs more than his bullets. They halted in a good position, made a hasty breastwork of rail fences, felled trees, and dead logs, and waited for him sullenly. When they saw by his deployment that they largely

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outnumbered him, they grew impudent and made such good volleys that they repulsed his first attack.

Now, Colonel Darr had a scapegrace son, Louis Darr, Jr., who wore his father's name and wore it in slovenly style; used it to run up bills and scandal, till the father was nearly frantic. Colonel Darr disowned his son at least once a month, and then, when the prayers of his wife and Lucy made his home untenable, and the son turned on a stream of the promises to reform, which he had always on tap, there was a family reunion, and a reënacting of the Prodigal's Return "by request." The performance never lost its fervour or novelty, often soever as it was repeated.

Louis Darr, Jr., loved Alabama Muir — or thought he did. When she had visited the Darr home, he had drunk in her secessionist doctrines as if they were the very revelations of a sibyl. He promised once that, if war came, he would fight for the South. For this sale of his soul, he received one large kiss from Alabama's lips, and a vague promise of more when the war was over. In view of the meanness of his soul and the richness of Alabama's lips, the bargain was not so unfair.

Young Darr had never breathed his secessionist sentiments in his father's hearing. Of his father's wrath he had a most complete terror. He knew how short-lived and easily undermined that wrath was, he knew well how to wheedle it away, but while it was in its prime, he kept out of sight.

When the war broke out, he made no fine speeches about States' Rights. He bade no fine farewell to his paternal rooftree. He simply sent his mother

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a note by mail, and skedaddled out of town after dark. In the superstition that he had inherited some of his father's military skill and prowess, he was given the second place in command of the troops he had joined.

Colonel Darr had no idea that his son was with the flock of partridges he had brought to bush. If he had known it, he would have been madder than ever.

Young Darr had no idea that his father was with the Union troops that followed in such businesslike manner. If he had known it, he would never have counselled the stand they made in the thicket.

By successive rushes, Colonel Darr had brought his trusting pupils to a well covered position close to the Rebel breastworks. He harangued his men in thunderous tones as they exchanged volleys with the enemy.

He was to windward of the Rebels, and the breeze carried his smoke across their lines with a lazy, lingering concealment that made the Colonel furious. He began to swear. The same impartial breeze translated his profanity literally to the Rebels.

Young Darr was exhilarant with the fun of holding the Union men in check. He was buoyed up on the stilts of power and self-esteem. Suddenly his stilts bent under him like whalebone. In painfully distinct, and more painfully familiar accents, he caught these words:

"Give the damned renegades a few more volleys, boys, and then, by the Old Scratch, we'll go in and bag the whole damned organi-hell-fired-sation."

Young Lieutenant-Colonel Darr's plastered hair

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suddenly rose to a bristling pompadour. He hurried to his colonel's side, and his teeth rattled so he could not speak.

His superior looked him over in amazement, and exclaimed:

"Why, my boy, you look as if you'd seen your grandfather's ghost."

"Worse'n that," young Darr chattered, "I've heard my father's cuss-words. That's Dad over there! And he's got his dander up. If he charges he'll kill every one of us; for God's sake, let's get out of this."

He led the way to the rear. He had just self-control enough to take his colonel's horse. He forgot to take his spurs out of its sides, once he jabbed them in.

His departure broke up the party. Colonel Darr, seeing the commotion, ordered a charge. The Rebels threw down their loaded muskets and threw up their hands. Every mother's son of them surrendered — except one, who was out of range before his absence was discovered. He never stopped till his horse fell under him. Then he footed it the rest of the way to the South.

Colonel Darr returned with a gang of prisoners that outnumbered their captors. Only a few were wounded on either side. The men felt that they had had hardly more than a field day, a rehearsal for real war. A chance for actual business came soon.

One night the Forty-first Regiment was ordered to strike camp quickly, and then to strike a powerful Rebel force a knock-out blow.

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II.

LEAVING aside the petty affair of arresting their Rebel neighbours, it so happened that, except Colonel Darr, no one in the regiment had ever seen a real fight. His staff, his majors, captains, lieutenants, non-coms., and privates were all in total ignorance.

When the order to move fell like a bombshell in the camp, stage fright was the chief terror all of these officers felt. If they had only known that the Confederate raiders under Colonel Bradford, whom they were sent to check, were equally ignorant!

But this they did not know. They had not learned General Grant's principle of action, that the enemy was always as much afraid of him as he was afraid of the enemy.

A disorderly mob of jovial Rebel horsemen and plodding pedestrians went north, exploring lanes and pikes; making a Hallowe'en out of running off Federal sheep and cattle, borrowing sleek Republican horses, sticking their sabres in fat and squealing Unionist pigs, practising their marksmanship on well-fed Abolitionist poultry, practising their jokes and not their manners on Northern women; pulling Abe Lincoln's farmers out of haymows and from under beds, playing horse with them, and occasionally, from sheer exuberance of spirits, shooting those that ran or resisted.

What would have been an unspeakable outrage

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on decency in peace time was a legitimate and unusually mild affair for war time. But gossip magnified it into an incursion of bloodthirsty Huns spreading fire, slaughter, and rapine through the vales of plenty. The venerable anecdotes that always accompany these raids reappeared in the perfect disguise of circumstance, name, place, date, and affidavit. Nobody recognised the ancient fables. Every one was horrified.

The Forty-first Regiment, not yet whipped into shape, was ordered south by boat to check the Mongolian terror. The officers, most of them running over with physical courage, could not sleep, think, or move, for fear of disgracing themselves by such blunders as were being chronicled all along the frontier. They went about their duties like somnambulists, parroting such strategical and tactical maxims as they could remember. They eyed each other fiercely to hide their inner tremors, they were gruff with their men to convince them of their great violence of temper. Yet the one thing in all the world that each officer most feared was himself.

While these agonies were tormenting the regiment on its journey south, the newspapers were describing them in terms of higher praise than Cæsar's Tenth Legion, Belisarius' Bodyguard, Cromwell's Ironsides, Tarleton's Thunderbolts, or Marion's Men could ever have deserved.

Newspapers containing such accounts fell into the hands of Bradford's Raiders. It was a case where he who reads may run. The Raiders at once decided to turn their "bloody fetlocks" homeward. They got themselves hopelessly lost in the strange

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country with captured guides, who did the North a humble service by leading the Raiders astray, and got curses and kicks as their martyrdom.

The Raiders huddled together in terror of this "fearless Forty-first" Regiment, each man of which was apparently an Achilles, as each officer was an Odysseus. Newspapers could not lie. The panic of the Raiders grew day by day, and they were lost completely, till they struck the Mississippi and started following its current south, at last finding a guide to trust.

Meanwhile, the old stern-wheeled tubs that carried the Forty-first on its mission of death or glory had debarked their contents some miles below. There were hours of fuss and flutter, before the regiment was ready to strike inland. Suddenly some one remembered that some one else had forgotten to bring their ammunition ashore. Ammunition being rather useful, they waited for it, and night found the companies bivouacking, every which way, a helpless package all arranged and tied up for a wary enemy.

Before sunrise the next morning, a swift-horsed farmer came clattering into the lines, his excited animal paying no heed to the sentinel's challenge, and the more excited rider not even hearing the bullet that whizzed through his flying back-hair. The horse, dashing down a dark company street, stumbled, and the rider, by a lucky mishap, was catapulted through the door of Colonel Darr's tent, where a dim lantern was sputtering.

The Colonel sat up in bed, grabbed his sword,

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and still half-asleep, swashed manfully at the dim quadruped.

A quick duck saved the farmer's head; a few words woke and calmed the Colonel. The farmer found that his sagacious horse had deposited him in the very tent of tents, and he yelled:

"Colonel, the Bradford Raiders is coming this way. They camped at my farmhouse last night, and I had a hell of a time sneakin' away. They'll be on ye abaout an haour later."

About the same time a villager of Rebel sympathies was bursting into the Raiders' camp with news of Colonel Darr's arrival.

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III.

WAS there excitement in the camp of the Forty-first, and running to and fro, and giving of incoherent orders, countermanded before they were understood? Is there any stir in a poultry-yard when a hawk's shadow is seen on the ground? As he questioned the farmer, the Colonel threw on a few clothes and threw off a few orders. Then he rode out to reconnoitre the ground, cursing the laziness that had led him to postpone the duty the night before.

He deeply desired to lay an ambush, but the nearest ground for surprise was an uncleared forest full of ditches and underbrush. It was some miles distant. The troops that reached it first would have the best advantage, and, other things being equal, the victory.

He galloped back, ordered his men to forego the tin-clatter of breakfast preparations, and set off at once on the double-quick. The order was passed with zest, and obeyed with wild cheers, which the crafty Colonel had difficulty in quenching. The guard left in camp had the look of schoolboys kept after school.

To those who marched there was something eerie and mischievous, like a schoolboy prank, about the adventure, and like schoolboy conspirators the sol-

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diers giggled and hustled, talking in whispers, and laughing in chuckles.

"Well, this is something like war," said the moustacheless Spinola, trying to turn a little snort of childish glee into a manly cough.

"It's a reckular pignig," laughed Schimmelpfennig.

"This is where old John Brown's body sets up in his grave and —"

The sentence ended in a grunt as his chin struck the knapsack of the man in front of him. The command to halt had been given by silent signal, and it was obeyed with much grinding of toes upon heels.

"What the dickens are we stopping here for?" every one asked his profoundly ignorant elbow neighbour. That question, with its cousin, "Where the devil are they taking us now?" summed up about all the private in the ranks ever knew of that war, and the myriad halts, the advances, detours, and retreats he was commanded so constantly to make.

The men halting in the hollow between two ridges seemed to be in a trough of darkness, perfectly hidden by the slight swell of land. Above the edge of the trough the sky was dimly alight. The heavens were bustling with their early morning chores, getting the fields ready for the sun. Against a shifting glimmer as of lanterns moving to and fro, the men in the hollow could see a group in silhouette. The Colonel at the brow of the hill was telling his plans to a huddled group of horsemen, his staff and such of his field as were near.

John, trembling with the before-dawn ague and

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with the cold hand of responsibility on his back, sat on his shivering, whinnying horse and listened to the Colonel's scheme of affairs.

It struck him as a bit academical and bookish. The first thing was to push on with all speed to the woods, ready to go at once into hiding at the sides and end of the road which ran through a deep ravine; or in case the Raiders were there first, ready to storm the woods in a properly arranged line of battle.

"It won't take all of us to give those Rebs a warm surprise-party, if we beat 'em there. If we don't we must have a flank attack up our sleeve. So John —er—Major Mead, you take your men off the right to that gully off yonder, keep them under cover as well as you damned can, and feel your way forward; when you hear our guns, close in on the skunks and paralyse their left. Don't lose any time, and come down on 'em yellin' as if all hell was let loose so's to make 'em think you've got at least a brigade, instead of a battalion. Go 'long, now; we've lost too much time already. The rest of you—"

But John was off on the gallop, gathering his men out of a rag-bag of darkness and disorder, and leading them away off to the right. His men looked back rather ruefully at the main body, but footed it as fast as possible. In a few moments they were out of sight of their friends. They felt a trifle lonely and spookish.

The advance-guard tore down the rail fences enough to let the men through, and John rode here and there, keeping his troops closed up, and tossing a few jokes and compliments to his men to keep them from thinking and talking too much shop.

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His jokes made great effect on the overstrained nerves of his men, all hysterical with excitement. But in his heart John felt ugly disgust. It shamed him to be sent sneaking off to take the enemy from the side. He had often read of these flank attacks, but they sounded simply bookish. What he wanted was a good straight slam, choosing a good position to hold, and attacking the enemy from this by straightforward boldness and dash. But of course he must obey.

He found himself on the edge of a great clear space, a grass meadow, leading to the gully that was his destination. If he crossed the clearing he would be as plainly seen in the inpouring daylight as if he were passing in review. Farther to the right was a wide field full of Indian corn, breast high. It would take more time, but it meant almost perfect concealment. With a sweep of his sword he waved his line aside, and leading it under cover of the ridge, at length brought it to the edge of the corn-field.

The order was given to go through with arms at the trail and backs at the droop. The men plunged in as into a sea. Dismounting, John led his horse down a narrow green aisle.

It was a mysterious place. Each tasselled stalk seemed in the morning vaguery to be an Indian brave, his scalp-lock tantalisingly ready for the grasp of the enemy that dared attempt it. John thought of the hordes of Indians who had been hunted away from these very fields. He thought if these stalks were really braves surrounding and outnumbering his little battalion as now, what full

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red revenge would be reaped for the years of white oppression.

The broad corn-leaves were like swords. In the morning wind, blade fenced with blade. One thin edge slashed John's cheek and cut it. As he reached with his handkerchief to check the little flow of blood (his first war-wound), there came from far off to the left the splash of a full volley. It was as if a giant had thrown a great shovelful of coal against an iron grate.

A sullen echo followed, broken by the spatter of surprised reply.

The battle was on, sharp and sudden.

"They're at work, and we're way off here," John exclaimed in chagrin. He vaulted into the saddle and called to his men. They rose from cover like the soldiery sprung from the dragon's teeth that Jason sowed.

"Come on, boys, or we'll be too late to get any scalps," he howled.

To the side of the field he led the way, sprawling and trampling the corn-stalks, till he gained the clearing he had lately scorned. A rail fence ran so close that his horse had a poor chance for it, but John would take no refusal, and the beast by a good deal of snorting, scrambling, and scraping, managed to get all four feet over, his rear hoof bringing off two rails.

The battalion swarmed after, and ran pell-mell across the meadow.

The scouts and advance-guard lost in the corn had to run to catch up with the main body. Those

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who should have been flankers and supports and rear-guard were jumbled in with the stampede.

John's hat blew off, and he was glad. It let the cool morning into his hair. He held his horse in with difficulty, and kept a little in advance of his men, noting, with only half regret, the absence of formation. Every feeling was swallowed in the lilt of the charge.

Off to the left, the firing had lost its tentative and spasmodic nature. It had settled down to the grim drizzle of an all-day rain.

John almost regretted the utter absence of firing from the neck of the woods at the gully. Assailing that serene, unresisting forest was too much like Don Quixote charging the windmill. He thought with a grin how Don Quixotic he himself was, long-legged and lean, on a stumpy and most unwarlike charger.

He would have grinned less had he heard the chuckles of Major Mark Lane of the Raiders, trying at the same time to be ferocious enough to make his impatient butternut ambuscaders hold their fire in spite of the tempting contagion of the merry battle in the distance.

"I'll shoot the first —— —— —— who fires before I give the order," snarled young Major Lane from behind a tree; then he tittered, "See the —— —— —— blue devils come." His very profanity sounded like a scattering volley.

Into the fatal gully John led his breathless but jubilant troops pell-mell. The gully was a twisted sack. Round the curves and down to the bottom of the sack John gaily charged. Then he groaned

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in disgust as his men huddled in upon him like sheep in a frolic. "Climb for it, boys," he roared, and sent his horse at the steep slope, which his men attacked on all fours. As they clambered, they gossiped.

"Silence in the ranks!" John ordered.

In the hush that followed, there was an uncanny keenness in the sound of a strange, clear voice that shouted aloud from the invisible, as an angel trumpeting doom:

"Ready! Aim low! Fire!"

Like the single blade of a scythe the stream of bullets swished over the ground, and along the ranks of John's battalion. Many a giggle of joy turned into a gurgle of death. John's horse sunk down with a scream, and the heel of John's shoe went flying.

Quickly he got to his feet, and quickly he saw with horrible nausea that the ghastly joke was turned upon him; the ambusher was ambushed. He sickened even more to see about him the writhing, shattered bodies, the distorted, mangled features of men who had been boys with him, grown up with him — of men whose sweethearts he knew — and whose mothers he knew!

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IV.

BUSINESS soon swept away sentiment, and John cried:

"Take cover, a tree, a log, anything. You'll get killed if you run. Lie down. Don't shoot till you see your man. Don't waste your cartridges."

He knelt behind a stump, threw down his useless, disgraced sword, and snatched a gun from the chilling hands of Spinola, the gracious youth who had first congratulated him on being major.

There was a smile on the boy's face now. It was not a pretty smile. John thought of Spinola's mother, and the wild Latin grief she had always felt at her boy's least mishap. What would she say now? Mothers! Mothers! how much they were thought of, talked of, written of, sung of, in those days! Oh, the place they fill in the heart of a nation! the agony the nations fill their hearts withal!

John turned Spinola's body over on its face under pretext of getting its cartridge-belt away. He left it prone. How could he aim straight with that face beneath his eye?

The cartridge in Spinola's gun was not empty. He had died without a shot. A few weeks of camp, a river journey, a sudden morning waking, a run through a corn-field, a dash across a meadow —

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a bullet stopped: that was his service and his reward.

John took careful aim at an officer leaning nonchalantly against a tree, and looking another way. The man's left elbow was against the bole of the tree — back of the elbow was a bright button — beneath that was a little hard, traitorous, vital spot. How clean a bead he has on it! The end sight just nicks the place.

Now it wavers and will not rest. Why this weakness? Great God! it is a human heart he is aiming at.

A finger-twitch and a man is dead, a fellow man, a man who is smiling even now. War is not so noble, after all. It seems but wholesale assassination.

The officer glances John's way. His eyes widen. He jumps, whirls round behind the tree. It is too late to fire now. John is not altogether sorry. If he had known that this man was Major Lane, that he commanded this wing of the Raiders, that it was his high, clear, cornet-voice that had cried, "Fire!" he might have felt more regret at his delay.

First compunctions soon vanish as the bullets begin again to fly, as John hears a ludicrous, deep grunt, and sees "Pig" Schimmelpfennig fall over supine behind the log that was not big enough to screen him. His huge form shakes like a tun of jelly. Then it shakes no more. John sees the handsome Maurice Tourtelotte looking wildly at him through a stream of blood that pours from his gashed forehead. He sees the pious, churchgoing Ezekiel Proudfit hanging to a low bough and waver-

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ing to and fro; you would say he was drunk if you did not see gouts of blood belching out of a rip in his loins. John turns from the abundance of such sights to save himself from a sort of seasickness. He begins to feel that if he is not careful he will be afraid. He finds strength in shooting at the enemy when he can find one to shoot at. Three times John fires, and a Rebel yell rings up his score each time. But the long, complex business of loading is maddening.

Meanwhile his men are weakening in numbers and in spirits. They are on the verge of panic, of crying "Enough!" and "Mercy!" With his gun loaded and aimed, John sees out of the corner of his eye that Peter Platt (the Informer) has tied a handkerchief to his ramrod and is lifting it. John grips his musket just back of the muzzle, swinges out with it, and knocks Platt's ramrod flying. The butt of the gun bats the Informer across the head with brilliant astronomical effect. The jar sets off the trigger. The bullet cuts a new buttonhole in John's coat, flies out under his arm, and into the eye of a Rebel who was just getting a perfect aim below John's left shoulder-blade. If John had ever known his luck, he might have called himself a man of destiny.

He did not see the shot. He was thinking hard and fast. The thought of the white flag of surrender was the greatest shock yet to his pride. He yelled to his men in a voice of thunder:

"Now's the time for cold steel, boys. Fix bayonets, and, when I say, Charge! get up and follow

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me. The Colonel needs us over at the other side of these woods."

There was a faint cheer, and the busy jar and rattle of bayonets shuttled into place.

"Are you ready, fellows?" cried John.

A fairly decent hurrah answered, and seizing again his sword, he got to his feet, shouting:

"Come on; give 'em a bellyful of cold steel, boys. Charge."

As the men rose, there was a scorching volley that brought many a fiery spirit back to the sod, choked many a gay hurrah. The line wavered, but John, as one of his scorched coat tails flew off on the wind, howled:

"Now their guns are empty. They can't stop you. Charge! Charge!"

It was the one moment when fate hangs pivoted between failure and success. A push either way decides it. The jubilant Rebels had empty barrels unshod with bayonets. It took time at best to load those guns. There was no support from the next man's elbow, and a mass of troops. Each man was alone, behind his own tree, captain of his own thoughts and actions. From everywhere, the Yankees were springing up, forming line, and charging home. There was nothing to do but bolt. One Raider started to the rear, another seconded the motion. The resolution pleased immensely; it was carried by acclamation.

The flight of the Raiders acted like spurs on John's boys. Many who had thought they were wounded found they were not hurt, when it came to pursuing a routed enemy.

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Gallant Major Lane was struggling against his troops as a swimmer caught in a current of logs. He swore, pleaded, wrestled. Finally he raised his sword to strike with the flat of it, a panic-stricken, hysterical corporal. Just then John loped round the tree and brought down his own sword — not the flat of it, either — on the officer's head. Lane's hat saved him from instant death, but he fell like a chimney struck by lightning. His men fled in every direction.

John paused for an instant's meditation. It would be fun to play tag in this beautiful old forest. It would be easy to gather in prisoners. But he might be seriously needed by Colonel Darr.

With much yelling and gesticulation, he and the other officers recalled the most of his force. It was impossible to get all — and little isolated duels went on all day from tree to tree — among derelicts who alternately made each other prisoner or victim.

John hastily detailed a few slightly hurt men to take care of the dangerously wounded, and to fetch them the water they were wailing for like children in the night.

Then John quickly formed what remained of his battalion, meanwhile sending ahead the scouts and flankers, and the strong advance-guard whose usefulness he had learned at such cost. He gave orders to veer off from any Rebel skirmishers or troops; he was too weak to carry out his first plans. The best he could do was save the wreckage and perhaps aid Colonel Darr a bit.

The morning sun sent long, level, prying beams into the forest. The trees were all gold on their

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eastern flanks. Garrulous birds filled the leaf-tent over them, or whirred away from the loud surf of the many-footed tread.

Soon the men neared the edge of the forest again. They were halted there, and John, going to the very rim of the woods, looked long and fiercely at a curiously fascinating sight. The broad meadow gave such a panorama of battle as is not often seen outside of pictures.

John saw at once that the whole Raider line held the woods. Evidently Bradford had got there first. The first volley, then, had been theirs. The Raiders were now advancing out of the woods.

A few hundred yards away was the irregular line of the Forty-first Regiment, full of gaps as a ricketty picket fence. It was retiring slowly, doggedly. Between the two lines were many dead and more twisting, squirming wounded, rearing themselves in agony, like earthworms stepped on in a path. All these dead and wounded were in blue.

At a glance John saw the story of the fight. The Forty-first had rushed on the woods and been ambushed. It had fallen back and re-formed. From the occasional strips of wounded, like foam left by waves, it was apparent that various charges had reached so far and been shattered by a perfectly controlled volley.

Now it was the Raiders' turn to charge. Far over to the distance the cavalry were mounting. At this end the officers are busy. In the excitement, none of the Raider officers seemed to miss the wing that John had managed to smash; they had taken it for granted that it also had been successful.

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John is angry at this insult to his own powers. Then he feels that his victory is, after all, in vain. His regiment is retreating — the Forty-first, which carries his military hopes like a banner, is beaten! To reach it, he must cross in full view and under fire, or he must sneak back through the corn-field.

The corn-field is evidently the safest course.

> "He who fights and — retreats
> May live to fight another day."

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V.

JOHN opens his mouth to pass the order to retire. Shame sweeps over him and chokes him. The taste of defeat is so vile in his mouth that it enrages him. He will stake all on a rush.

The Raiders are just going to move. The order, "Forward — guide right — double-quick — march!" is echoing along the line. The graycoats move off at a jog trot.

John signals his line forward, points to the enemy, steps back out of the way, gives the command in a low voice, "Ready — aim — fire!"

With satisfaction he hears such a neat incisive volley as the Raiders themselves have been delivering all morning. The volley is as well aimed as it was well delivered. It strikes the Raiders in the back like a great sidelong exclamation-point. They cannot imagine where it comes from. They pause to consider. Their impetus is gone. Their fine, straight line swirls like a snapped whip. The Rebel officers look over their shoulders, and lower their swords in bewilderment, their eyes and mouths agape. Some of the officers are on their hands and knees, with bullets in them. More of the men are flopping on the ground like chickens with wrung necks. The cavalry on the horizon are far ahead

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of their line. They look back amazed. They make a beautiful wheel and scud to the rear.

The Raiders are half-convinced that they are dreaming. But there is only one thing to do — to finish what they have begun. The line is hastily, pluckily reformed. The charge begins again.

Colonel Darr's men have had a breathing-spell. They are waiting in surly mood, one line prone, one line kneeling, one line standing. In spite of the before-breakfast work, the empty-stomach surprise, the pounding it has had, and its groggy condition, the Forty-first Regiment is doing its State proud.

Colonel Darr is too much excited to swear. He is going to hold his profanity and his fire till he sees the whites of the Rebel eyes, jolt them with a volley, and then receive them on the hospitable bayonets well-braced. The officers keep calling:

"Don't shoot. Wait for the command."

The Colonel, from the top of the ridge where he had lately planned his victory, waits in chagrin. Suddenly he rubs his tear-stained eyes. He hastily puts up his field-glasses. They tell him the same astounding story. From the woods to the right of the Raiders comes another line of troops. And they can't be the left wing of the Raiders, for they are dressed in blue — in blue! and the flagstaff leaning forward carries the unmistakable, the ineffable beauty of Old Glory! The Colonel yells to his fluttering staff, "By the Lord, boys, that's Mead's battalion. God bless him! He's going to take the hounds in flank and rear."

Dreams are poor things, after all. They never imagined such a picture as this. Colonel Darr can

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hardly keep from weeping with joy. Then he thinks if his own volley is postponed as he planned, it will endanger Mead's men.

There are still a few moments of grace.

He stands up in his stirrups, whirls his sword aloft, and with a roar in which his very vitals seem to take part, he shrieks the order, "Fire!"

It is repeated by the surprised officers; obeyed by the befuddled soldiers. A blaze runs along the whole line. A curtain of choking, blinding smoke is spread. The men can see nothing. Only the Colonel and his staff above on the bridge can see with what havoc the volley plunges into the Rebel line. Those who are hit stop, and topple, and go to ground. Those who are unhurt cannot help pausing a second to find if they are dead or not.

At this moment of unsettlement, they hear another strange sound, again from the side and rear. This time not the bellow of guns, but a roar of cheers.

Colonel Darr saw it all like a prophet lifted up on a mountain of vision. He saw his boys from the old home State come out of the woods on a glorious lark, lunging forward on the run with bayonets bristling and eager. Now and then a man stumbles and falls, but by quick work he can catch up again, for John leads his men at a good, steady lope. They will need their strength a little later.

He brings them forward on the bias. He cannot restrain their sudden yells of rapture, nor his own, as they come clattering on the heels of the Raiders.

At the right moment he runs out to the head, where he ought not to be, and therefore doubly delights to be. He turns, and with a yell unheard in

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the din, but understood in pantomime, he quickens the pace to a full charge. Into the sides and backs, kidneys, livers, ribs, water-bottles, cartridge-boxes, and leggings of the Raiders come poking those inquisitive Yankee bayonets.

The miracle seemed to be that any one lived at all, or that any who lived forebore to flee. But many a Rebel felt only a spur in his flank, many and many were untouched. They halted, faced about, fired, stabbed, waved clubbed muskets, grabbed at the Yankee barrels, and wrestled for life, fighting with tooth, toe, elbow, head, and every weapon of art or nature.

The confusion was utter; the tangle was inextricable. Still the two lines fought in chaos.

John's men had lost the impetus of their charge; the Rebels had not fled as they ought in all decency to have done; the line was being reinforced from the reserves in the woods and from the other wing.

At this crisis, the earth shook with a new tremor. Colonel Darr had hurled his centre companies forward on a charge. This new tidal wave there was no resisting.

The Raiders — or such of them as could — broke for the woods. Even the cavalry wing had had so many saddles emptied, or so many horses shot out from beneath troopers' legs, that it was in no shape to add élan to the occasion. The horsemen hovered here and there to cover the retreat, but Colonel Darr scattered them with two or three carefully placed volleys. And the mobile part of the Raiders disappeared into the woods. Prisoners surrendered in large numbers.

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By quick thought and makeshift dispositions, Colonel Darr organised a pursuit that ended forever the existence of Bradford's Raiders as a separate body. Poor Bradford never knew how the fight came out. Unless he got the news in the other world.

In the despatches Colonel Darr greatly regretted the loss of his lieutenant-colonel, who had lost an eye and an arm, and would have to retire. He magnified above all his officers Major Mead, "who, after crushing the left wing of the enemy, turned, and by a sublime charge at a critical moment, crumpled up the main body and produced a check, which a charge from my centre and left turned into a complete rout. I earnestly recommend this gallant and brilliant young officer to the attention of the department."

For at least two days everybody in the North talked of Major John Mead, and one of the weeklies two weeks later revived him from oblivion by printing a wood-engraving of him in a circle in the upper corner of a full-page picture of the charge "from sketches," a picture in which John could never, to save him, recognise a single resemblance to reality.

"Oh, yes," he said, "they've got one thing right. The flag did look like that. It had just that many stars and stripes."

But the imaginary realism of the scene thrilled many a doubtful heart in the North to volunteer and risk life in the service of country and ambition.

Mrs. Mead, you need not be told, made a ribbon frame for the engraving, and cried with rapture every time she looked at it. As for John's father,

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old Jim Mead, everybody in the village esteemed it such a privilege to drink with the father of Major Mead, that poor old Jim was kept blissfully drunk for a whole week without a cent of expense. And he felt so dignified even in his cups that he actually forbore to beat his wife. He even began to talk of enlisting.

A telegram of congratulation to Colonel Darr came from the Secretary of War with a brigadier-generalship for him and an important command. Major Mead was brevetted colonel, with a promise of a full colonelcy at the first opportunity.

Some time later the Governor of John's State, on a visit to Washington, told Lincoln of John's early struggles, and the great heart warmed to him with a keen sympathy; they were brothers in the kinship of humble origin oppressing lofty ambition. The President looked out of his window into the distance. He was not staring toward the Richmond that was so ridiculously near and yet so tragically far, but back into his own sad, hard youth. He breathed deeply, wrote hastily on a piece of paper, and in a voice trembling with sorrow, asked the Governor if he had read Artemus Ward's latest funny-bone tickler.

What Lincoln had written on the paper was a note to the Secretary of War.

"Please assign Brevet-Colonel Mead to command of the Ninety-sixth Regiment at once. I understand it is out of a colonel. Mead is out of a job.

"A. LINCOLN."

Before the commission could reach him, John was wounded and a prisoner.

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VI.

AFTER the victory over Bradford's Raiders, and the phœnix pride rejoicing upward from the ashes of defeat — after the drama and the poetry, again the plodding detail of the trade of soldiering. First the wounded must have their thirst and their bleeding quenched; they must be lifted from the hard couch of the earth; the surgeons must be given practice in amputation wherever there was the faintest excuse for it. The plump and luxurious McCrullis, to whom his mother's voluminous feather beds had hardly seemed soft enough, was the last one found, where he lay behind a log that was no more motionless.

He said, when he could speak, "The pain and the anxiety wasn't anything to the hell of layin' there with the sharp knot of a hickory limb stickin' into my side, and me not able to budge. I thought I'd die for sure, or go mad. I tell you, agony ain't a patch on a little naggin' discomfort like that."

After the wounded, the dead. From a distance they looked to be only drowsy shirkers sprawling about the sunny field in sheer basking laziness. But oh, the long idleness before them! the unending holiday to loaf! The ex-soldiers thus mustered out, thus honourably discharged!

When you came nearer to them, you saw why they lay so still. Of some of them you could hardly be-

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lieve that they had ever been men, or that they could possibly have chosen such ridiculous, such unbecoming poses to die in. Here and there were those whose bodies seemed familiar, but whose faces were past recognition. It was necessary to rummage their pockets for an identification, a trinket, a letter. John felt called upon to help at the odious work. The things he had to read! The misspelled words, the bad grammar, the little gossip, all so garishly lit up in the radiance of a holy death for one's country.

In one man's pocket John found blood-smeared letters from three girls, each breathing passionate fidelity to the betrothal. And in this same pocket was a fourth letter from a broken-hearted girl, Sarah Parker, begging him to come home at once and marry her as he had promised, and as she had too rashly believed. The envelopes of these letters were gone; the names given to the man that had received them were only the foolish nicknames of love. At last a tent-mate identified the mangled heart-breaker by a scar on his ankle. John hid the letters from other eyes, and sighed:

"Poor Spinola! you'd never think he had once been so handsome, or had such a way with the women! Poor little Sally Parker! What's to become of her?"

That night he solved the problem the only way he could — by putting it in his mother's hands. He sent her Sally's letter, and wrote:

"Mother, treat her as if she were your own chick. I couldn't ask more for any one."

After the dismal ceremony of paying the dead

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their poor wages of hasty burial, a badly played funeral-march, a volley that spattered, a bugle wail that cracked on the last note, came the humdrum of making out the endless lists of casualties, of prisoners, of properties lost and taken, transfers, requisitions, the filling of the gaps with new recruits, the rearrangement of the roster, the squads, the officers, the endless reels of red-tape, some of it useful.

The busy idleness had an abrupt end, an order fell from a blue sky. The regiment must move instantly; it must hurry into southwestern Missouri, to Springfield, whither the German-American Franz Sigel was retreating before a gathering cloud, and where the fire-breathing genius, General Nat Lyon, with his body-guard of ten big St. Louis butchers and a brigade of twenty-seven hundred men, was hastening with the desperate, ruthless, fiendish zeal that marked all its acts. The Confederates were preparing a powerful force to regain the State whence they had been almost all driven.

John Mead had been serving as acting colonel since Colonel Darr had been assigned elsewhere. In the bewilderment of new duties and new responsibilities, he had been almost distracted. He seemed to forget all he knew, and more. The simplest solution was to him as a problem in calculus, and he had never studied calculus.

At the drills he feared even his horse, a new and cantankerous steed with no military ambitions. He expected at every swerve to find himself standing on his head before the regiment. Chills and fever played tag up and down his spinal column. He gave orders mechanically, and was amazed to find the

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regiment moving about in good fashion. He wondered what internal adjutant had brought this order out of the chaos in his head. His own voice seemed to be going its own way and saying what it pleased in unfamiliar accents.

Occasionally he jumbled the regiment up as ludicrously, as inextricably, as the wise men of Gotham got their legs tangled and could not tell them apart. But as each of his subordinates usually made some mistake on his own hook, and as the few spectators had not the faintest idea what was going on and thought everything magnificent, no complaint was raised. All over these United States other patriots unused to command were earnestly making fools of themselves in the same way. But they usually made heroes of themselves when it came to the actual show-down of war.

To John, in his anguish over the trifles of drill, the command to move at once and with the utmost speed, was partly a relief, partly a new terror. He confided in Joel Healy, the politician, now promoted major.

"They've given us an impossible thing to do. But we've got to do it all the same. I don't know how we'll look when we get to Springfield, but we're going to get there if we're worn off up to the knees."

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VII.

CAMP was quickly struck. They crossed the river in all sorts of boats and on rafts. They squeezed into a cattle-train, and knew the joys of such travel. They soon had cause to regret even this luxury, for the line went only part of their way. They detrained, and moved off as soon as they touched ground. Company formations were assured as they marched, men darting here and there to their places.

The night in the cattle-cars on the bumpy track had given them more aches than sleep. But there was no waiting for even forty winks. Into their hard dry eyes, already quivering with the sand of unrequited sleepiness, the dry roads flung dust by the handful. Their feet beat it into an upward snow-storm. They breathed it in their nostrils, felt it in their ears, licked it off their dry and thirsty lips with their parched tongues; it whitened their eyelashes and turned their blue uniforms to the gray of the Rebels.

Then the hateful yellow plush of dusty levels gave way to hard and flinty hills, where their feet scraped, slipped and wrenched, and their weary soles gathered exquisite blisters. A mile of up-hill pull, a mile of jolting down-hill. Then more dust, an atmosphere of dust, to be swum through.

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League on league, and the weariness of bone and muscle, of tendon and bone, built up a mutiny within. It began to seem that it would be beautiful, and dignified, and sweet, to fall out and drop down in the grass alongside the road, under some tree, and there rest, and rest, and rest, and die rather than obey any further despotism from the tyrannic officers.

Men closed their eyes and slept as they walked, jostling against each other and cursing drowsily, as toe struck against heel.

The line tailed out, in spite of the constant cry of the officers:

"Close up, men; close up there."

The wail seemed to follow the men into sleep, and harry them there as if it were the shrill persistence of a mosquito:

"Close up, that four! Here, you! Close up!"

The sun broiled down on them, and the sky was as the hot lid of a frying-pan. John saw on the horizon a grove; it seemed an inviting place to halt for dinner. Into it the line plunged with thankful anticipations of the shade.

It proved to be a jungle of swamp-land. A storm had washed holes in such poor road as there had originally been; the rain had opened gullies of soft, sticky, stinking mud, that clung to the feet disgustingly; the rain had undermined the roots of great trees, and they had sprawled across the road, and must be crawled under, clambered over, broken through, for there were no pioneers with ready axes to precede this regiment, and clear its way.

Progress was slow, exhausting, but even the most desperate did not dream of halting in such a place.

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Stagnant, scummy pools spread a sickening waste and fumed miasms. The odour of the place was as of a charnel. This region was to an honest forest what a mouldy, neglected cellar is to a conservatory.

It seemed that nothing could live in such a stifling region, but the unkempt and riotous trees and vines.

And then the insects! It seemed as if the clouds of dust the troops had waded through before had turned into a whirlwind of gnats. They stung like poisoned needles; they thrust their annoyance and pain everywhere. Their hum grew intolerable.

Three hours of woe this dolorous path gave the regiment, and when at last the men emerged into the daylight again, they were hysterical with fatigue, and mad with hunger.

If the roadway had been trying to the footmen, what must it have been to the baggage-train, and to the stupid drove of cattle that obligingly carried the regiment's beef on their own legs? Hours were spent over the efforts to yank a wagon out of mud that overflowed the hubs like water, and clung like glue. Several wagons were abandoned; a few mules were suffocated in the mire. These were the lucky mules; the others had to live under the welt-raising lash, and the crackling profanity of the gnat-maddened teamsters. There was no hope of the supply-train keeping the pace even of the infantry.

Fortunately, John had ordered his men to take in their knapsacks that modest provender known as "three days' rations." The supply-train could not be waited for. It would be hours behind, and, if necessary, John stood ready to sacrifice it altogether. A brief halt was ordered.

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"Moving with a wagon-train as a tail is like trying to sail a boat without pulling up the anchor," John groaned to Healy, as he sat munching a chunk of "sow-belly," and looking round on the sad, worn faces of his men, almost too busy rubbing aching bones, and caressing throbbing feet — almost too tired to eat.

When John looked at his map he found that, for all the squandering of energy, they had gone only twenty-seven miles since they left the train at daybreak.

"I've got to do fifty miles before to-morrow to keep to schedule," he said, and he was as sorry for his poor boys as if they had been sons out of his own loins.

"It can't be done," said Healy, with a yawn; "it ain't in 'em."

"I know it ain't in 'em, but we officers 'll have to get it out of 'em."

"Nope," repeated Healy, "it can't be done."

"I know it can't be done, but it's got to be done and it's going to be done."

During the forenoon a number of the men had sunk under the flagellation of the sun, and the hospital corps brought them up. The rest were worn down with the heat, and panting like hounds.

"We'll wait till the sun's a little lower, then we must git up and git."

The men lolled about on the ground too weary to talk, many of them too tired to sleep, or even to smoke. A few that slept had only a harder fate. They must rise and shake off the deliciousness of sleep, and walk again on their galled feet.

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As the sun withdrew to the scarlet room in the west, the hateful bugles called the men to fall in again.

With such weary groans as those old martyrs felt when, after a first day's ordeal, they were wakened from sleep to go again to the rack, these men rose with bones alive and muscles dead from pain. The pity mothers feel when consigning their tender children to the cold and sodden grave was akin to the pity those wretches felt for their bruised and tender feet that must suffer again the bastinado of the hard road.

Then they solemnly realised how small a fraction of war is the actual fighting. They understood how vital a factor is the shoemaker for a soldier; how important a part a bad cobbler may play in retarding an army's mobility, and ruining its morale. How is a soldier to make haste, how is he to charge fiercely, to give his whole mind and heart to his battle when he has a splitting toothache in every battered toe, when his instep is cross-laced with gashes, when his soles are watery with blisters, and knifed with wrinkled flesh, and when his raw heels stick and rip in his blood-clotted socks?

John ached as he sat, weary on his wearier horse, but he had thought only for the agonies of his men. He would have broken down and wept for their suffering had his tears not been burned away in his wrath at the thieving contractors who had wrung a Shylock's usury out of the flesh and blood of patriots.

"A dishonest army-contractor," John cried to his adjutant, "is not merely a dirty, contemptible thief;

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he is a murderer. Look at the lives he costs his country by destroying the perfection of the troops. He is more dangerous than a regiment of spies. He is a spy in disguise. He is worse than a spy; he is a vile traitor. He ought to be branded as a thief, and put to death for high treason — the shameful death of a spy caught in our uniform!"

But meanwhile here are the men doggedly trudging their thorny path. The sun goes down, filling the heavens with the panoramic fireworks of his departure. Stars look out timidly from their casements, and call their sisters to stare at the dreary line of mortals agonising along the winding ways. For what? For what?

The moon floats upward like a great bubble, released from somewhere back of the retreating horizon. And the bubble seems to follow the troops, dancingly, teasingly.

In the dense forest-glooms the moon still follows behind the lattice of the branches. It is bitter cold in the deep woods, and now and then an owl prophesies with ill omen from the unseen, in the voice of a Macbeth witch. Whippoorwills repeat and repeat their elegies with a wailing self-pity that the soldiers understand only too well.

They know at last the true meaning of the old phrase, a "heart-breaking march," for they are crushed with grief at their own pain. There are lumps in their throats at the thought of their own anguish. They are so sorry for themselves, for their hands and shoulders, so sick of the leaden muskets and the tight straps, for their poor muscles, their aching eyes, their heavy breasts — so sorry that

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their hearts are fairly breaking. And merciful sleep pleads and beckons, insistent, wooing as a mother's arms, and lap and bosom.

Their commander, John Mead, they both hate and fear, and yet understand. He hates himself; he is gritting his teeth to fight off his own drowsiness, smothering him, suffocating him like a blanket; to withstand the whispering of his pity for his men, the weakness that clings to his elbow like an Iago.

But his duty is as his religion, a fanatic's ideal. He will walk through fire for it, undergo any test. He has his orders, and he is here only because he is trusted to carry them out. He thinks of his men as pack-horses who must do their task, though they are flogged to it, though they perish under it. They must not only keep marching, but they must march fast, at their utmost speed. So he keeps lashing them with the sharp insistence of his will; he hounds them with an assumed rage and contempt that is worlds away from his feelings; he storms at the laggards, herds up the stragglers; rebukes the foot-sore, heartsore captains and lieutenants when they weaken; holds them sharply responsible to him and to the government, and to the general to whom they are hurrying with desperately needed aid.

And so on they go, ever on, through the long night, till the very moon falls behind and drops exhausted, till the east begins to throb and quicken with the chill gray and the red tinge of dawn.

The sight of the beginning of a new morning is too much for the troops. Somehow they have lived through the night. To march all day under the flails of another sun is too much. A loud murmur

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runs through the line, too weak to be a mutiny; only a wail.

There is not yet light enough to see clearly. John calls to him an orderly with a lantern. He scans his map, crumpling it impatiently as he spreads it on his horse's mane. With a finger numb with the cold and the long grip of the reins, he finds his place. He looks about him and sees on the horizon a little spire, clean and keen against the scarlet-streaked sky. It must be the Methodist church in the village he had set himself to reach. He has done his fifty miles. He turns in his saddle, thrusts his hand high, and cries:

"Halt! Fall out!"

The men do not need a further hint. They have fifty hours' sleeplessness and fifty miles of quick marching to atone for. They do not unsling their knapsacks, they do not unroll their blankets, they do not choose the spot, or care for mud, dust, brambles. They fall on their faces in the road or in the weeds at the side of it, fold their arms for pillows, and sleep.

Sleep!

All but a few of the doubly wretched. They must serve as pickets. It is the enemy's country.

John superintends the placing of the sentinels in the best spots, gives a special warning of vigilance to the wild-eyed officers of the guard, has his panting horse relieved of the heavy saddle, and tied to a tree. He takes the saddle for a pillow; wraps his blanket round him, and instantly knows the bliss of oblivion.

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After two hours of nothingness that seemed two minutes, the hard roads resounded with a clatter of hoofs. The hoofs gave an excellent imitation of the familiar stage effect of an approaching steed. With a final flutter of thuds the horse was pulled back on its haunches, and a properly breathless rider flung himself to the ground; beat a cloud of dust from his breast in regulation style, and drawing a dramatic paper from concealment, exclaimed, with theatrical effect to the sergeant of the guard:

"Orders for the commanding officer."

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VIII.

THE little hailstorm of hoof-beats had half-wakened John, as if it were his boyhood friend, the rain, tap-tapping his old roof. He woke only enough to feel how soaked with ache and sleepiness he was. When the officer of the guard brought the messenger forward, John had no power to conform to etiquette. Raising his eyelids was like heaving open two cellar doors, and he had nothing to prop them with. He looked appealingly to the officer of the guard, and said — or almost snored:

"Read 'em, please."

The officer, reeling with drowsiness, managed to make it plain to John that General Lyon's troops would not probably fight for three days more, and that he wanted John's men to arrive in good, fresh condition. This was more important now than speed, since the blow, when it was struck, must be delivered with full force.

John sighed as Atlas must have sighed when Hercules took the world off his shoulders for a moment. He said:

"Best snooze I ever had. I mean best news ever had. Lieuten't, give mess'ng'r prop'r 'structions an' 'knowl'gments, and send 'm back. Then better relieve guard an' get some sleep. We won't move till suns't, thank God."

John rolled over on his other side, to signify that

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the interview was ended. And he returned the salutes with a snore.

The lessening clatter of the messenger's horse was again only rain on the roof, pattering through the dreams of a little boy worn out with playing soldier.

The messenger, after some adventures, arrived at the camp of General Lyon, and delivered John's sleepy speech in good set terms, with a prelude to the effect that "Acting-Colonel Mead presents his compliments," etc.

But to some of his friends, he informally said:

"I thought I must be the prince visiting the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. But if I'd 'a' had to wake Colonel Mead with a kiss — whew! well, he'd be sleepin' yet."

John slept at the rate of about sixty miles an hour. When finally he woke and bathed his face in a bucket of water, he found his little army wearing an appearance decidedly of the morning after. The men were now fully awake to their wolfish hunger, and the company cooks had the fires crackling and gleaming through the woods.

The wagon-train had come up now, and some of the cattle were already drawn, quartered, and subdivided, and simmering on the spit.

John decided to make a tour of inspection round his picket-line. The miserables, whose curse it had been to have their tour of guard-duty fall at this time, were shuffling about on feet bloated with pain. The brief periods of sleep in the guard-tent had only made it harder to keep awake on post. The men

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wavered along their paths, stumbling blindly, and groping through drowse as through a fog.

John, fearing what he might find, went the rounds alone. He came upon one man beating himself in the face to keep awake. Others eyed him haggardly, and failed to give him the salute. He did not remind them, or hold them responsible, but went by with heart aching.

In one lonely spot, as he looked ahead, he saw what he had feared to see — a sentinel asleep. The lad had leaned one arm across the muzzle of his gun, and bent his head upon it, resting his cheek against the flat of the bayonet.

A wave of merciful pity overswept all sense of stern justice in John's soul.

"It's poor Sandy McLaughlin. He's an only son. If I find him asleep, he'll have to be shot. It's discipline — but, my God! —" John mused. "Humph! I used to be able to knock over a rabbit about that far. I wonder if I could just —"

He stooped, picked up a clubbed branch, and threw it with careful aim. It hit where it was meant to hit, and knocked the butt of the sentinel's musket out from under him, bringing McLaughlin to the ground on all fours.

By the time he had recovered enough from his panic to pick himself and his musket up, John appeared in a fit of violent coughing.

McLaughlin saluted as best he could, pale and trembling like a ghost in a heavy wind.

John smiled benignly upon him, and said:

"Glad to find you awake and alert, McLaughlin.

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The relief is coming in a few minutes, and you can have a long sleep."

When the trees had swallowed John from sight, McLaughlin realised the whole truth. He wrote his mother about it. She never dared breathe it till recently.

John often used to find a pair of great eyes fixed upon him almost with adoration. They were McLaughlin's eyes, and John understood that they were saying what his lips dared not utter.

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IX.

WHEN the Forty-first Regiment finally reached Springfield, it was received with more enthusiasm than its somewhat shop-worn appearance seemed to justify. John was called at once to a conference of officers in General Lyon's tent. There he learned with a shock that his relentless, feverish haste had only added one more candidate for sacrifice.

General Lyon was criticising his superior at St. Louis, General Frémont, with a freedom of language startling to John.

Lyon, after brilliant successes, had found himself confronting a returning flood-tide of Confederate power. He was outnumbered, according to reports, at least three to one. It was one of the few occasions when the Rebels outnumbered the Union troops.

Lyon, foreseeing the evils of retreating, and yielding to the Southerners the territory he had gained, had bombarded General Frémont's headquarters at St. Louis with every possible appeal for reinforcement. It was next to impossible to reach General Frémont at all through the royal retinue he kept round him. And once he was reached, evasion or vague promise was all that could be gained.

General Lyon, whom none could accuse of cowardice, advised retreat, and placed the reasons before the synod of his officers. He explained how

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he was vastly outnumbered, and how a large part even of what forces he had were going home, because they had enlisted for a war that was to be finished in three months. And this war had hardly begun.

General Lyon was saying:

"If we don't retreat soon, we can't retreat at all. Besides, we've got a lot of money in our wagon-train. We've got two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash from the town bank. The Rebels mustn't get hold of that. It would give 'em more joy than capturing our whole force."

The consensus of advice seemed to be to retreat at once. The order was given. The quartermaster hastened away to get the wagon-trains ready. The officers fell to discussing routes, all leaning over a map on the table except two: John, who held aloof, dismal with a sense of the uselessness of his bitter efforts at speed; and one other officer, who paced back and forth angrily, and at length broke out:

"General Lyon!"

"Well, Sweeney."

"General Lyon, I think it's a terrible mistake, sir, to retreat. We endanger the lives of all the Union sympathisers down here. Hundreds of them would follow with their families. That would hamper us, and we'd probably get cut off by the Rebs, anyway. It has already been urged that we retreat into Kansas for fear of being intercepted. That uncovers the whole State of Missouri, and they'll have St. Louis besieged soon. And then all the Rebels that are keeping quiet now will rise and overwhelm us. I tell you, sir, we ought to fight. That's what we're here for. And even if it's a Ther-

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mopylæ for us, by God, sir, I'd rather die at Thermopylæ than live by running away from a mob of traitors, just because they outnumber us."

The speech was as a torch to prairie grass. A thrill stirred all the officers. Almost without dissent they were for a stubborn defence. General Lyon returned to his old impetuous self.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "we don't want to brace ourselves, and wait for any of your damned Thermopylæs. We want to strike the first blow, and strike it so hard and so unexpectedly that every man of ours will count as five. You've heard how the cyclones drive straws through oak planks? Well, that's the way we'll go through these Rebel hordes."

The quartermaster appeared at the door of the tent.

"Wagons will soon be ready, sir. When do we withdraw?" he asked, meekly. General Lyon blazed at him:

"When we are whipped back, sir, and not before!"

Then there was a powwow over the plan of battle. John had not yet learned to decipher the meaning of a military map, and he sat silent and bewildered.

He was rejoiced to hear the elaborate plans for a powerful flank attack. He had deeply repented his former scorn of this bookish manoeuvre, since he had seen it save the day in the battle against the Raiders. He hoped to be included in the flanking force, but learned that he was wanted with the main body, and as he was the youngest officer there, he was given the left centre of the line.

Some of the officers were in favour of a night

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surprise, but General Lyon told the difficulties of fighting in the dark over unknown ground, where different members of the same army usually shot each other to pieces. " Besides," he added, " — well, I'm not superstitious, as you know. They call me an atheist. But I have a premonition — a very overpowering intuition that if we attack at night, we'll be defeated. We'll fall on 'em at daybreak."

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X.

THE pitchy night was no darker than the minds of the Union soldiers as they were marched out of Springfield on Friday. Rumours of advance and retreat had been so tangled and untangled and retangled, that the men in the ranks were all as wise as Socrates: they only knew that they knew nothing. They had left town by different roads in different directions. Their trend had been southward, they had turned sharply northward, then east, and where not? Whether they were still jogging bravely south, or were now sneaking weakly north, there was nothing to tell them except the North Star. And that was out of sight behind heavy rain clouds. And the land-lubbers could not have recognised it if it had come down and perched on their flagstaff.

On they went none the less, saturated with equal quantities of curiosity and ignorance.

After they had been hustled along for some six hours, they were cautioned to keep the greatest possible silence. Two hours later they were suddenly invited to lie down in the road and sleep with one hand on their guns, and one ear erect for a command. They did not know that the advance-guard had seen the Confederate fires gleaming on the hills like a new constellation. They did not know that the Confederates had planned just such a surprise

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the night before, and would have surrounded Springfield had a storm not intervened. Nor did the Confederates know that the Union troops were only a pistol-shot away.

In that black pre-natal hour before dawn, a light but chill shower came sweeping across the little army huddling on the ground. It broke their rest and left them feeling mouldy and sticky. And it woke them to a thirstiness which there was no chance to quench. Soon a little ferment of daylight began troubling the east. It showed a sky billowy with cloudy threats. Immediately the officers began moving about forming the line. The men rose, chilled, to their places, stamping their feet, swinging their arms; the very marrow of their bones seemed to be a quaking water ice. The officers' voices came jerkily from their throats, palsied with cold and excitement. A cup of coffee and a tower of buckwheat cakes would have seemed fairly appropriate, but never a sip nor a bite they got.

In that rough, hilly country a slight depression swallowed a regiment from sight. The different bodies saw little of each other, and all sense of direction and distance were lost in the haze of bewilderment. John's regiment stood yawning through chattering teeth, and rubbing its sleepy eyes in most unmilitary manner.

Suddenly there was a distant sound as of a popgun. It was followed by a little clutter as of a few firecrackers. There was a shrill and distant yelling as of children playing. You might have thought it was a Fourth of July morning in a village. There was a flutter like a trill on a snare-drum. It was

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the rapid fire of musketry. Eventually somebody, with little sense of rhythm, seemed to belabour a great bass drum. It was a battery opening up.

There was something so remote and unimportant and childish about it all that John's men looked at each other and grinned. After a farther long wait, some one started to hum a song to cover his embarrassment. The rest joined in. It was a popular camp-tune with a refrain:

> "So let the wide world wag as it will,
> We'll be gay and happy still."

The song reached General Lyon's ears. It bothered him as he planned his battle. He asked who the noisy recruits were. Some one told him the regiment's name. He sniffed.

In the midst of the regiment's refrain came a jangle of orders. They were signalled to move forward at the double-quick.

"We're to take that hill, boys," John cried, dramatically.

Taking the hill consisted in simply taking it. Nobody offered any objection.

The men had felt that the hill was a curtain hiding a panorama of the battle that was evidently going on busily out of their sight. They were doubly eager to capture the hill. They went up it as a drove of small boys goes up the gallery stairs to see a melodrama. When they got to the top, there was little more to be seen, but another valley with a smudge of troops here and there, and then other hills irregularly scattered like building blocks dropped by a careless baby Titan. From an idyllic

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patch of woods in the distance came occasional silent puffs of smoke, as if an amiable giant were enjoying a morning pipe. After a long, wearisome wait, the regiment was ordered to run down a slanting road. A halt was made abruptly, and the men ordered to fire a volley at the peaceful giant smoker. It seemed a foolish waste of time to empty a thousand barrels at a nook of such harmless appearance, with never a man or a gun visible. While they were laughing at the folly of their officers, they were led away on another jog. Then they halted. A clear creek meandered by flutily. The men had had neither food nor drink for over twelve hours, but when some moved toward the stream, they were hastily ordered back to their places.

There in the valley they waited in disgust. Back of them the hill shot up; at the top of it they could see a few men and officers lounging here and there knee-deep in grass and weeds. Now and then the hill would tremble with an earthquake. The wisest guessed that there must be artillery up there. The men began to make fun of the whole affair with boisterous humour. They called it a sham battle at a county fair.

General Lyon and his staff came galloping along. He paused, and asked the regiment's name. He frowned when John told him what it was.

"Your men show too much levity to be good fighters, Colonel Mead," he growled. "War's a serious business." Lyon looked serious. In his hat were two holes, and down his forehead a wash of red was dribbling from a scalp-wound.

"My boys will be business-like, General, when it

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comes to a show-down. Give us a chance," John pleaded.

"You think so, eh? Well, you're about all the reserve I've got; go up yonder and give the First Missouris a breathing-spell." And he was away. There was a pool of bloody dust where he had paused; from his heel a wound poured out a trickling stream that made a tiny red trail where he galloped.

John led his men forward; as they came to the foot of a new hill, heavily wooded, he deployed them hastily as skirmishers, and took them up the incline on a run. They were soon in as genuine a battle as they could wish. The Confederates were trying to force the position at all costs, but they were received with such blistering volleys that they could not but retire for a new rally and a new charge. They were so many and so stubborn, however, that their final success began to seem inevitable. They were wearing out the enthusiasm, and sapping the confidence, of the Union troops. And then the wealth of ammunition they were costing! The men began to look with distrust on their thin array of cartridges.

At a critical moment, there was a terrific uproar back of them, and Totten's battery came up with a tremendous rattlety-bang, and a spasm of hurry. The guns were soon unlimbered, loaded and aimed, when a large body of men came from the flank. Preparations were made to give them a smashing volley all along the line, when some one cried:

"Don't shoot; they're our men! They're reinforcements!"

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Everybody stared hard. Sure enough, there was the bonny flag at their head, the sacred Stars and Stripes. The strangers received a cheer of welcome instead of the volley about to leap at them. Reinforcements were sadly needed, as they were gladly welcomed. They came gaily forward.

"Where the dickens could reinforcements be comin' from?" John asked his adjutant. "I've never seen those men before. If it should be a trick?" Suspicion and certainty were born twins, and he cried, "It is a trick!" He stabbed his spurs deep into his startled horse, and galloped along the line, the frantic beast plunging over the ground. John flew along the front of his troops, crying, "It's a trick, boys. They're Rebels. Get ready for a volley. Wait for the command."

The men, who had been standing carelessly, and waving their hats at the newcomers, fell feverishly to work to load. Totten galloped to John, yelling:

"Don't shoot! They're our men!"

John howled back:

"You're crazy. They're Rebels. Look at 'em."

The strangers, seeing the changed attitude of the regiment, had come to the charge bayonet, and were quickening their pace. They were giggling over their piratical prank and its easy success.

What is more dumfounding than the shock felt by an urchin, so gleefully absorbed in playing some trick, that he does not know the master is tiptoeing upon him until he receives a deafening, dazzling, backhanded cuff across the ear? Nothing, unless it were the amazement of those Rebels, when they received, in place of the cheers of welcome, a

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swinge and swishing of a razor of bullet and shell, some five hundred yards long.

The sudden revulsion upset their spirit. They decided not to play the game any longer. They picked up their things and started for home — such of them as could pick up their things. Into their flying ranks the battery pumped destruction with unusual pleasure.

Later, General Lyon's hawk eye picked out a certain tiara-like hill-crest that promised a good chance to silence a certain garrulous masked battery. He called for volunteers to take it, and John asked and got the job. He was assigned three companies, and dismounting, led them off to the rear, and by a détour through a pigmy forest of hazel brush up to the base of the hill.

A scout he had sent on ahead came loping down the hill, to announce that the Rebels had evidently seen the same place, and were making for it in confident style.

John paused a moment, then ordering silence in the ranks, brought his men up just back of the brow of the hill, and made them lie down and crawl forward through the long grassy eyebrows of the ridge. He went forward on hands and knees, stalking his prey as he had hunted other big game. He cautioned his men by signals, and held back their fire by pantomime threats and warnings, till the other side of the hill was noisy with the rattle of the Rebel approach — till the suspense grew intolerable; till each soldier wondered if he must lie there to be trampled on, wondered why his thumping heart was not louder than any drum in the enemy's ears;

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till through the long rank weeds John could tell which of the bright-eyed young Southerners had longest neglected to shave.

Then, with a curdling yell, he gave the command so hungered for by his own men, so undreamed of by the enemy only ten yards away. Up from the ground sprang John's three hundred mushroom soldiers, and into the very faces of the Rebels, into their very gapes of amazement, emptied the deafening, mangling volley.

It was as if a smoking meteorite had plunged into a flock of sheep. The rout was absolute. When the heavy black arras of smoke was indolently drawn aside by a lazy breeze, the Rebel troops were not to be seen. Shattered remnants cluttered the ground. The rest had fled like mad to the concealment of the woods.

But the magician's blanket of smoke, that had hid their disappearance, was now a perfect target for the battery, which opened on the hill in full blaze. The shells came up the incline like an advancing hail-storm, killing the wounded and shattering the dead of Rebel cause. Then the range was found perfectly, and shell after shell, like shrieking, taloned harpies, swooped on John's line, gouging it to shreds. Lying down gave no safety. The place grew hot as a gridiron. The men grew restless. They were prey to that most devastating emotion that can attack a soldier, the sense of being a helpless target for hostile skill, of the powerlessness to retaliate, of the dismal uselessness of death.

John rose and walked along the hill-rim, to set them an example of calm. Outwardly, he was

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sternly resolute. Inwardly, all was ferment. He felt that he was a foolish gambler, spendthrift of his treasury, and playing the game, though he saw it had turned against him. He began to feel a sinking nausea in the stomach; he began to wonder if he ought not to lead the way to the rear very hastily; the brave words he was saying to his men sounded hypocrite to him — insane, rash.

He was afraid — scared almost to death. A coward was encouraging the timid. Then the ground seemed to give from under him, as if he had put his left foot into a quicksand. He came heavily to his left knee.

"A shell has torn the ground from under my foot," he thought. "It's lucky it wasn't an inch higher."

As he struggled to get back to his footing, he decided that the hill was untenable, that every moment he kept his men there was a service to the enemy, an embezzlement from the small funds of his own cause.

"To the rear, march," he cried. "Steady, boys, no disorder; but get out of this."

The men rose and hurried down the hill, and he after them. Wherever he put his left foot there seemed to be a hole, as if he were walking through a prairie-dog town.

Private Silas Stibbs turned back, glanced at him curiously, hurried to him, saluted hastily, and said:

"Lean on me, John — I mean, Colonel."

"What for?" John growled.

"Why, you're wounded, sir."

John looked down at one red, ragged trouser-leg, and grumbled:

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"Well, I'll be damned if I ain't."

Now that he knew that he had a wound, he knew that it hurt, and hurt fiendishly. He flung his left arm around Silas' shoulders, leaned on the man's right arm, and hobbled swiftly after his troops, wondering angrily at their haste, and cursing every hazel brush that reached out to curry-comb his wound. As they picked their way, Silas was advising his colonel to retire to the field hospital, and was getting himself and his solicitude cursed along with the hazel-thicket.

John insisted on conducting the remains of his battalion back to its old place. As he reached the line, he felt vaguely the chill of general dejection that was invading the hearts of the men. It was like walking into an ice-house on a hot day. They had repulsed onslaught after onslaught, but they were too few to follow up their success, and leave their shelter. And always the Rebels returned, and always, always; now the defeated rallied again more desperate than before; now brand-new troops seemed to come from an unseen factory. There was the sickening of the deferred hope that Sigel's men would appear in the rear. The absence of any sign of a battle in the distance discouraged the men. They kept muttering:

"Where's Sigel?" "Where in hell is that Dutchman?" and with bitter humour, "Vat's de metter mit dot damned Sigel?"

Above the Rebel lines seemed to rise a spirit, such a spirit as the old Crusaders used to think they saw in the clouds. But it was not a vision of divine leadership beckoning them to victory; it was

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a wraith of demons chuckling over the defeat that was preparing. The Union men sniffed disaster as the great cattle armies in a blizzard sniff stampede.

It was growing harder and harder for the file-closers to goad the men back to their places. It only needed a platoon to break in unanimous despair, and overwhelm the dam of the officers. Even General Lyon's hope was oozing. He stumbled toward John, and complained:

"The day is lost."

John, still leaning on his human crutch, thought of the horrors of the forced march his men had undergone to share this day's work. He cried:

"No, no, General; let's try once more."

General Lyon said:

"If you could only give them the bayonet, we might make it."

One of the junior officers looked at John's leg, and said:

"But who will lead?"

He hoped to be called upon to snatch the bubble reputation, even in the cannon's mouth, but General Lyon exclaimed:

"I will lead you." He turned and prepared to mount the horse the big German butcher, Lehmann, was holding for him. So, his face smeared with the grime of blood and sweat and dust, and one of his boots polished red from his own veins, he made a garish leader.

Before he could leap into the saddle, a shell splashed into the neck of his horse, and splattered the bystanders with a spray of gore. Then poor Dapple Gray fell with a great snort, and his flying

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heels threatened the general he had carried so bravely. Lehmann offered him his own horse.

Lyon rubbed the blood from one of his eyes with the back of his hand, vaulted into the saddle, swept his saber from its sheath, and went to the front of the line, with a clarion call:

"Come on, you brave men!"

In all chivalry he caught his hat from his head with his sword hand, and moved out into the thick of the storm.

The cheer that rang from his throat, and the chorus that went up from the exalted hearts of the men, were suddenly quenched like torches smothered in dust.

General Lyon wavered in his saddle, toppled limply, and then slid off. The giant Lehmann caught him in his great arms, and eased him to the ground, where he was soon only a heap. A great sigh soughed along the line, and all impetus was gone. All eyes were on the tumbled heap that was their general.

Then the butcher picked up his idol as if he were a slaughtered sheep, and blubbering aloud like an overgrown baby, carried the body back to an ambulance.

For twenty minutes there was a funeral hush. The Rebels were gathering for a grand movement along the whole line. The Union troops had cause enough for silent dismay. The command devolved on Major Sturges. He was hastily conferring with other officers. The stillness was so heavy that almost the only sounds were the wails of the wounded pleading for attention, but most of all for water. To a hurt

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soldier, lying exhausted and aching in the dust, and broiling in the heat, thirst is the bitterest of wounds. But there was no water for the wounded, and none for the unwounded who waited, panting and parched, like an overdriven herd in an alkali desert.

The silence was so general that it was evident to all the officers that Sigel must be either annihilated or routed. It was many hours before they learned the full truth of his short, sharp disasters, and the loss of three-fourths of his troops, his flag, and all his guns but one.

Major Sturges was saying to a group of officers, frantically trying to think:

"There's no question that we are hopelessly beaten. The thing to consider is how we can save this army for another day. If we are to get off at all, we must retreat at once, under as strong a rear-guard as we can secure."

John was standing where he could see a segment of the Rebel force. There was intense activity there, and this now took definite shape. A splendidly clean line came marching firmly out for action.

"Gentlemen," John drawled, as best he could, his tongue a flannel rag with thirst, "it's a case of all of us being rear-guard for awhile, for here they come lickety-split."

There was no time for further debate. The officers ran to their commands to stiffen them for the shock. The Rebels came on, heralded by a pandemonium of shells; some of them Sigel's shells from Sigel's lost guns. An artillery duel growled the diapason to cadenzas and trills and roulades of musketry.

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The firmness of despair is a noble granite. It was such a wall the Rebels dashed against. The Union troops fought with the ugly temper of defeat, or with the sublimity of resignation, as you like to call it. The Rebels came forward in roaring, steel-bristling lines, and broke like storm swells on the crooked reefs of the Union positions. When that wave of bullet and bayonet broke, the guns were so close that the blaze of the powder scorched and blackened many a face on the other side. But magnificent as were the long crests, and the orderly arrival at the climax, after the billows broke they always fell back in a seethe of confusion.

The monotony of the Confederate rally and return, though, was again nagging the strength out of the Union nerve. John saw again the white mist of panic stealing over the fagged-out soldiers. Yet again came one of those long rollers toward the wreck-strewn beach of war. John's men began to glance backward eagerly, as if to learn the paths of retreat, to lean together and shake their heads in hasty gossip. Something told John that this billow was to be a tidal wave that would crumble the dyke.

A fury of protest against accepting defeat hardened his heart. His leg had stiffened, and he forgot all thought of pain or of self. The Cause summoned him. He drew his sword clumsily and angrily, shook off the clinging Silas, who thought he had gone mad, and limped swiftly out before his regiment, and howled from a rusty throat:

"Wake up, boys, and show 'em they're not the only folks that can charge!"

The regiment was glad to move anywhere away

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from the line that had grown odious — retreat or charge, anything was better than being smashed in the shell like turtles. Out of their shells they came, and other regiments caught the infection, and a wild counter-billow rose as from an earthquake under the sea, boiling and urging forward against the inveterate storm-swells.

As he ran, John turned his head to see how his line was behaving. His heart leaped with pride at the straightness, the business-like look of it, the neat, white lace of bayonets. Just then the ground folded up under him, and he was sprawling somewhere in a pitch-dark cellar. He propped himself up on his hands, and a club or something knocked him down again. It was a man falling over him, but he couldn't be expected to know that, for he was all alone in a black and very damp cellar, filled with a thousand shrilling locusts.

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XI.

THE inside of his head was in a most peculiar uproar, as if all the wheels or springs of a clock had broken loose inside it. His teeth were loose, and he spat them out — he thought he spat out about forty teeth in all, but was not sure of the count. And where did that bottle come from that is emptying such quantities of warm, sticky liquid into his throat, with a blurt and a gluggity-glug-blurt-gluggity. What the deuce is the matter, anyway, and how the devil did he happen to fall into a black cellar? And what was he doing when he fell in? Anyway, there's just one thing to do when you fall into a cellar, and that is to get up and get out. But where's his hat? He gropes for it in the dark, gropes and gropes, and when he tries to curse the hat, he only belches out more of that bottle-stuff. At last he finds the hat, puts it on backwards, knows it is on backwards, and doesn't give a damn. He must get out of the dark. He feels his way carefully, but has to crawl across various objects, apparently the bodies of men — doubtless drunken sots. Gradually the light begins to seep into the cellar, and now he is in a meadow. This is stranger still. If only that gluggity-glug inside his head would stop. He strikes his head into a boulder. This bothers him so he wants to cry, and loses his hat,

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and forgets it. He works round the boulder like a snail, and crawls on. He must get somewhere.

He has no idea where somewhere is, but he must get out from under that bottle, which seems never to empty itself. He pauses, and ejects a great mouthful of something that has a stupidly disgusting taste. He looks at it blearily. It is red, very red. Ah, it is blood. It must be his own blood. Then that blurting bottle is his own veins. Oh, it is all clear now. There was a battle awhile ago, and somebody must have shot him in the head. A nice thing to do! If he could only get hold of the sneaking cur, he'd tell him a few things! He does not know that a piece of shell had later gouged a deep hole in his side.

Who is that calling him from out in the distance? Where is that haunting, persistent voice? He looks up, stares stupidly into a face as big as a moon. It is the face of the old family doctor, who had brought him into the world, had saved his life time and again, and had never thought of getting more than a pittance of his bill paid; it was the old country doctor, who had volunteered and was a surgeon with the rank of major. But John no more recognises him than he did when Doctor Leith, then a new-made M. D., first helped him to open his eyes on the world.

The man's familiarity irritates John, coming as it does from a total stranger.

"You're all right, my lad; I'll take care of you. Your mother needs you when the country's through with you."

The stranger's smiling, cheery manner shows a

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lack of the awe that is due before one who is dignified with a serious wound. Besides, the wretch is mauling and tying him up in a most indeferential way. Some one else runs up, looks into John's face, turns white, and shows a decent sense of fitness by exclaiming:

"My God, it's the Colonel! Will he die?"

The first comer gives the second comer a great shove that sends him out of John's small circle of vision, and John, about to protest, finds himself saying, with a desperate cautiousness in wasting words when each syllable is a choking anguish:

"If could cork — bottle — much 'bliged."

The stranger is answering with his former cheer, but it is only a singsong jumble growing farther and farther away. Whether it is weakness or drowsiness, or the cradle of death that absorbs him drowsily, he does not know, nor care; he only feels that it promises the one thing desirable and dear, oblivion.

It seemed that the next minute some one was tossing him in a blanket; no, it was too hard to be a blanket; it was a board, jolting him excruciatingly. His head felt like the anvil of all the hammers in hell, and he would have cried aloud in his wrath and his agony, but his jaws were bound fast with bandages. Slowly his consciousness emerged through the haze of pain and bewilderment. He realised that he was in an ambulance packed like a sardine box. The ambulance was rattling at full speed over a shaggy road.

If John could have known all that had passed, he would have known that the charge he led had

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broken the Rebel charge, that the Rebel wagons had been seen to be on fire, and that under this apparent indication of a Rebel intention to abandon the field, the Union commanders had decided to withdraw while they could, with what solace there was in having the last word; with what glory in holding for six hours a field against what they reckoned three or four times their own numbers. Both sides, of course, claimed the victory, the Confederates with the better reason, since they kept the field, and the Union troops retreated with all the haste possible with good order, under the protection of a Home Guard.

When Major Leith had finished the first bandaging of John's wounds, the troops were returning from their charge, and the signs of retreat were everywhere. The surgeon, with the help of a hospital sergeant, picked up John's limp, long bolster of a body, and hastened with it to an ambulance. Every inch was filled with sorely-wounded men and officers, except the space filled by one dead body.

"Take that dead man out of there," Major Leith ordered.

An ambulance orderly objected:

"But that is General Lyon's body, sir."

The surgeon stroked his beard nervously. He looked at John, and thought of the mother whose chief hope of joy was in this her son. He spoke again, this time more sternly:

"Take that man out of there, I said. Better a live dog than a dead — it's too bad, but we've got to save this man. He's been very useful."

Reluctantly they took General Lyon's body out,

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and laid it on the ground. The ambulance drove away with John in his place, and for the time as lifeless in look and manner.

Poor Lyon! Fallen on the very threshold of a career that promised the eventual command of all the armies of the North. He had been an evolutionist — a Lamarckianist, they called him, then, before Darwin published his researchful theories. He had been an atheist and an Abolitionist at a time when the churches were timid of assailing, or were firm in defending, the patriarchal institution of slavery. The merciless sarcasm of his fate followed him after death. His body was left on the field, forgotten in the rush the army made for Springfield. There the absence of the dead leader was noted with horror. Major Leith and some attendants went back and asked the body from the Rebels, who granted it every honour. The Union troops evacuated Springfield the next morning before daybreak. Once more the body was forgotten. A lady there gave it decent burial. A few days later the poor corpse, restless as a ghost, was dug up and sent to St. Louis, and later it made the long journey to Connecticut, where at last it found rest.

John's body was hardly more tenanted than poor Lyon's had been. Long periods of unconsciousness were followed by hours of head-splitting pain that threatened to unseat his reason.

The only intelligible thing he could think of steadily, the only drop of water on his parched tongue, was this speech: "If I die, they'll give mother a pension."

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FOURTH BOOK

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I.

MAJOR LEITH wrote a long letter to Mrs. Mead, telling her that John was very seriously wounded, but that "by the help of his strong constitution, and the prayers of good women, the life of the splendid fellow ought to be saved." The effect of such a letter in the dreary log cabin of the Meads!

It would be unfair to say that the grief and anxiety there were keener than in any of the thousands of other homes, rich and poor, North and South, town and country, throughout the broad land whence sons and sons had gone forth, taking the sunlight from the walls, the lustre from the gardens, the homeness from the homes. But vast so ever as was the bitter communion-cup held to the lips of the nation, the draught was none the less bitter to each that must drink.

The Mead cabin was silent now under the awesome terror of what might be. Mrs. Mead paused in her work, to stand before the picture of John in his battle glory, and grief tightened round her heart like the gripe of a hawk's claws. John had sent to her most of his pay, and she no longer had the humiliation and drudgery of her former hard work, but the unwonted idleness only made her the more helpless to shake off her incessant anxiety. She stood for hours in the doorway, recalling the morning the

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little lad had trudged off to school across the horizon into the future. She remembered how lonely the hills looked every morning there, after they had shut him from view. She wondered if all those dreams they had shared, the hardships, the denials, the little victories, the progress, the promised triumphs, had been only decoying him across the horizon of life into the Beyond of death. The thought that all her boy's ambitions, struggles, achievements, golden hopes, were but the elaborate circumstance, the tinsel pomp of the Vanity of Vanities! She cried aloud in wild protest against such fate, she argued, pleaded, wrestled, and fought, as a woman fights, clinging, dishevelled, writhing, screaming. At night she flung out of horrifying dreams of John's agonies into the dark and loneliness of the cabin, and sobbed upon her pillow hot and wet with her fever and tears, till even old Jim Mead was constrained to reach out and pat her burning forehead, and even to take her into his arms, and lay his cheek upon her soft hair, as he used when they were first married, and when her first-born was only a vague ideal.

When Major Leith had written to Mrs. Mead, he had written another letter to the chairman of the Woman's Aid Society of Darryville. The women of this society were busy every day scraping off lint, and making bandages, clothes, and numberless comforts for the soldiery.

The executive mind and the cool head with the warm heart of Lucy Darr, had recommended her to the position of chief, and none outdid her in un-

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wearying labour and in systematic care. Major Leith gave her a list of the things he most pressingly needed; he briefly outlined the battle of Wilson's Creek, an ugly name for an ugly battle — the Confederates called it Oak Hills, a pretty name for a victory. In a catalogue of the losses, Major Leith had written:

"Brevet Colonel John Mead was dangerously wounded in the head; he is a friend of yours, I believe; like many another's, his one chance lies in careful nursing, and careful, cleanly nurses are the greatest lack we suffer from."

That afternoon the Woman's Aid Society of Darrville accepted with regret and much protest the resignation of its chairman. Mrs. Darr resigned her daughter under still more violent opposition, for remonstrances, appeals, commands, entreaties, hysterics, were all in vain before the sad, sweet firmness of Lucy.

When it was learned that Lucy Darr was going to the front as a nurse, six men, whose patriotism had previously been luke-warm, suddenly boiled over and volunteered.

The evening train took her and a few necessary bits of clothing southward. She waved farewell to many a tearful woman, who had given her messages to some husband, son, father, or sweetheart. But her eyes and her thought lingered most upon the harrowed face of Mrs. Mead, who had tried to tell her many, many things, and had only said, "Tell my — my boy — my boy that — he'd ought to come home — come home to — to his — mother."

Lucy, when she at last reached the camp of the

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Forty-first Regiment, steeled her heart against the multitudinous offices that a skilful woman could serve among the shattered wrecks of defeat.

Dozens of old acquaintances rushed up to wring her hand. Major Leith embraced her with the fatherhood of the old family doctor. But her first question was:

"How is John Mead? Where is he? Can I see him?"

Major Leith said:

"He's been taken out of my hospital, to a better place about eight miles from here."

A horse was secured for her at her demand, and an orderly sent to bring it back. Major Leith gave her a loaded pistol — purely for ornamental purposes, he said. She went galloping out on the crooked road that was to lead her to the new camp. When she arrived, it was to strangers that she had to appeal. But her beauty was passport enough. And Colonel Mead's name gave her what authority the dignity of her presence might need.

The surgeon apologised regretfully. "When Colonel Mead was brought here, I had not a cot to give him, and every bed in the village was full, so I had to send him away."

"But where?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know where they took him." He suggested another camp fifty miles way. How could she get there? By train. There was a freight train in three hours. Yes, it had a caboose for passengers. As it was a military supply-train, permission would be necessary. The surgeon gladly led her to the commanding officer's tent, through

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company streets all one stare of admiration. The commanding officer was away from camp. The next in command was somewhere about. A long search was made for him. He was at last found superintending the building of a mess-hall, by soldiers turned carpenter for the nonce.

He was busy and brusque, and not susceptible to beauty or beauty's appeal. Besides, to end the uncomfortable interview, he had not the authority to grant a pass. The commanding officer might be back in time. There was nothing to do but wait.

A few minutes before the train was due, the colonel came trotting up to his headquarters; he was very dusty and very thirsty, and he was in a towering rage with one of his staff, a criminally stupid commissary, whose indolence promised to leave the regiment without bread and beans for four days, though it was stationed in the very heart of plenty.

When the officer saw Lucy, he turned his profanity into a honeyed welcome with a neatness and despatch simply miraculous. He wrote her the pass with a fine flourish, and presented it to her with a deep bow. He sent an orderly to the train with her. Lucy ran most of the way to the little pine station, and there learned that the train was four hours late. How did she ever while away those hours? The orderly made as much conversation as he could, and procured her a little cold supper.

And at last the time went by, — the train creaked in.

But it was now very dark, and the officer in charge said that the train would not reach the camp she

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sought till two o'clock in the morning, if then — since Rebel sympathisers enjoyed removing the rails after the dark, for the fun of seeing the trains plough up the mud. So the officer refused to take her in spite of the pass. The next morning at five there would be another freight.

The train jostled out, and disappeared down the track.

Lucy, in despair, looked at the despairing orderly.

"What's to be done?" she said. "I can't stay here all night."

"Better come talk to the colonel again," the orderly proposed.

The colonel's shadow could be seen on the illuminated walls of his tent. His profanity was again sonorous. The orderly, after much hesitation, stuck his scared face through the tent-flap. He received a special volley of rage full in the eyes. He had just courage enough to say:

"The lady presents her compliments, sir, and —"

There was a perfect explosion of silence from the noisy colonel. Then his silhouette was in the door of the tent, and he was listening to Lucy's story as seriously as if it were the plans of a campaign.

"It is certainly a d— a very embarrassing situation for a lady, unattached to the hospital service. And I know there isn't a place for you there. Several of the nurses are quartered in the village already. But — ah, I have it. My wife is boarding in the village during my stay here. You just come with me, and I'll arrange that."

A long walk; a puzzled, then a cordial, reception; a sleep of exhaustion, broken before daybreak by

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the need of rising to catch the train. Then a dolorous journey by rail, a delay of five hours in a dense forest while the well-prophesied wreckage of last night's freight-train was cleared away. Finally the conductor announced that the camp she wished was just round the next hill. He would stop the train for her.

Once round the hill the place of the camp proved to be an empty meadow with all the wind-blown litter, the débris, the spoor of a departed army. A solitary farmer, searching about for anything of value, answered the conductor, who hung out on the lowest step and howled inquiries, while Lucy stood anxiously behind him. "This here place," the farmer growled, "is just chock full of malarier, an' the water is bad, an' most all the sojers whut didn't git the shakes or the dysinturry, got the typhus fever. So the boss 'lowed they'd better move camp, specially as they heer'n they wuz a lot of Johnny Rebs comin' this-a-way. So they ups and pulled their stumps last night, the whole kit an' bilin' on 'em."

"But where did they go?"

"Gol-dinged ef I know. Off thet-a-way, I reckon, from the tracks."

He pointed down the line.

Lucy went back into the dismal caboose, where she was bounced about like the dasher of a churn. The conductor seized the loneliness of the occasion to compliment her on her beauty in a jocular mood, and to leer at her with a glance that froze her heart. He meant nothing more than a mild flirtation, but how was Lucy to know that?

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At length a long whistling from the engine, the screaming of the brakes on the wheels, the bunting of the cars together apprised her of a station. The conductor left the caboose, and Lucy, looking out of the window, saw the regiment she sought, waiting like a herd of tired cattle alongside the track. She recognised them hardly more by their insignia than by their hollow cheeks, their cavernous eyes, their sickly beards, the number of them that leaned heavily on their muskets, and, grimacing with pain, were racked with coughs or wriggling with ague.

She hastened out. After much inquiring here and there, she found a corporal who seemed to know something. He told her that the very sick and the dangerously wounded had been sent on ahead with a special engine on a few cars. He pointed out a small object down the narrowing vista of the track.

"There she goes now. Mebbe your friend's on board. Mebbe he ain't. Leastways he's not with us. You can foller on this train, I guess, soon's we git our men loaded on. Most of these boys is goin' home; their term of 'listment's expired. Some of the fellers expired before their term did." He grinned sadly at his sad wit. "Some of the wounded was sent to us after that battle at Wilson's Crick. Mebbe your friend is one of 'em. None of our own men ain't saw any enemies except chills and fever. They're worse'n bullets, a heap."

It is a tedious business at best, loading a train with soldiers and their baggage. Every one of these officers and men was dead tired, and lazy with malarial stupidity. Lucy clenched her hands and

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paced the ground to keep from crying with impatience.

At length they were all stowed in foul cars but lately devoted to cattle whose ideas of personal neatness were not housewifely.

In the caboose were the colonel, his field and staff, and a few cases of sickness. Lucy killed some time ministering to these. To all the men and officers her presence was that of an incarnate angel, a patron saint made visible in ethereal beauty. Her beauty was medicine to them all. They God-blessed her frankly and gratefully. She brought them water, poured it on her handkerchief, and calmed their brows with it. It was the touch of cool that Dives begged in the fiery pit.

In time — always in time — the train reached a stopping-place. The engine that had preceded them was on a switch, panting as if from a long run. The wounded and the very sick were laid out on the ground. Some of them had died on the journey, their souls jounced out of them. Some of the dead you would have sworn but slept. Some of the living you congratulated for dead.

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II.

LUCY studied all the faces in vain. Nearest where she stepped from the car were two faces covered with blankets. These she sought last. A surgeon lifted the blankets away with one hand, the other arm outstretched to catch her if she swooned. But she shook her head and stepped aside to lean against a pile of ties. John was not here. Her last clue was gone.

She plied every one with question on question.

One of the surgeons suggested the large hospital at Jefferson City, where many of the wounded were taken who promised a slow recovery.

It was necessary now to waste another night in sleep. A place was found at a hospitable villager's. She spent several hours in blessed and blessing ministry, and many more in the rest of utter sleep. The next morning the angel left the regiment. The men watched the train that took her as if it were Elijah's chariot.

In due time, or in overdue time, she reached Jefferson City. She took her place in a line of inquiring men and women, seeking news or view of stricken sons, brothers, or lovers. When she reached the clerk, he looked into a large volume. Yes, Colonel Mead was there. The nurse of the ward was sent for. She came, a gray spinster, whose

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long-foiled instinct of motherhood was finding occupation here.

"Show this lady to Colonel Mead."

"But he has gone."

"Gone? Where? Was he well enough to go?"

"He improved rapidly, and he wanted to be at home. He was rather weak and childish, and he cried a good deal."

"John Mead cried?" Lucy exclaimed, incredulous.

"He was pretty sick. The strongest of them get homesick when they're wounded, and sometimes they die of it — they die just of homesickness. Then he told me a good deal of a young lady at home — a Miss Barr or something like that. He seemed to want to see her. He wanted to dictate a letter to her, and I got pen and paper, but it hurt him to talk, and he finally said, he could hardly tell what he wanted to say to anybody but her. He must see her, he said, before he d-d-died." And the old maid was weeping.

And Lucy wept with her, woman to woman. It was the first whole-souled, heart-emptying cry Lucy had had. She was stronger when she had kissed the old maid.

"And now I must hurry back to Darrville," Lucy sobbed, laughing with hope as she sobbed. "To think of his getting there and not finding me to meet him!"

He was to go as far as Lexington with Colonel Mulligan and a body of troops hastening to reinforce that point. It was just possible that she might overtake him. A few hours with John were worth

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any weariness to Lucy. She took her seat in the passenger coach, and fairly purred at the thought of John's convalescing, not in the ghastly, seedy misery of field hospitals, but in the very Eden of her own peaceful home region.

The conductor, as he took her ticket, felt that his fatherly gray beard gave him the right to ask:

"And what brings a young girl like you traipsing round the country on a train that, like as not, will be ditched or nabbed by the Rebs?"

"Is there any danger of that?" Lucy asked.

"Danger! Humph! No telling how fur we go before we're wired to turn back. We're lucky if they don't cut the wire. The Rebs seem to have their eyes on Lexington. That's fifty or sixty mile past the end of our line. This'll be our last trip, most likely, if we git through at all. Is your business pressing?"

"I want to get home to Darrville — Colonel Mead, my — my cousin" (she felt she had to say it —purely to economise explanations) "was wounded at Wilson's Creek. I've been searching for him everywhere. I've just found he's been sent home to get well."

"Whew!" whistled the conductor, "Colonel Mead, eh? That's too bad! too bad!" and after a hesitation he passed on down the aisle shaking his head sadly.

Lucy rose and hurried after him, her old anxieties fierce again.

"Tell me — tell me the worst — anything, so it's the truth."

The old man looked away uneasily. It was not

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part of his duties to break bad news gently to his passengers. Finally he put his hand on her shoulder tenderly, and said:

"My poor little girl, the joltin' of the train and the excitement of going home made Colonel Mead so much worse that it took six men to strap him down. He was so delirious the surgeon said he'd wear himself out in a few days."

Lucy dropped into the nearest seat and closed her eyes. She was almost unconscious, her despair so smothered her. The train stopped, moved on, stopped. She was foggily aware of it. Then it stopped longer than usual.

Then the old conductor came and woke her from her stupor.

"This is Sedalia. We don't go no farther. I just got word that Lexington is surrounded by the Rebels. You'd better give up. We'll take you back where you come from."

He went away. The train-bell rang. The train began to move — backwards. Lucy ran to the platform, shook loose a brakeman's detaining hand, leaped to the ground; fell.

The wheels snarled at her very throat.

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III.

LUCY whirled away just in time to escape. She was lifted to her feet by a bystander. The train glided past, and the conductor as he slid by, yelled into her very face:

"Well, you've got spunk enough for ten;" then his voice came fainter and fainter, "Take care yourself, and good luck to you."

When Lucy's skirts ceased to whirl in the draft of the train, she brushed them off as hastily as she could, and said to the stranger, who still supported her in sheepish embarrassment:

"I'm very, very much obliged to you. I'll be more obliged if you'll tell me how to get into Lexington."

"Lexin'ton! Gee-whiz! Most of the folks there is wonderin' how they can git out. Leadin' citizens here is takin' in their Union flags fast's they can. Looky there! That's Jedge Stoddard."

Lucy saw an old man playing the reverse of Barbara Frietchie's rôle, and hastily gathering in a flag that hung from his window. Over a distant roof, too, the stars and stripes caught her eye as they came limply down the halyards. There was evident excitement in the village. The stranger went on:

"Old Mrs. Harper, my next-door neighbour, 's out in her garden spadin' like a sexton in December.

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Buryin' the family silver. I ain't got nothin' to hide 'ceptin' a horse, an' I cain't hide him under the bed. I guess the Rebels 'll git him all right. I refused a offer of fifty dollars for that nag just las' week. I'd sell him for ten cents now."

"I'll take him," said Lucy.

After a stare of incredulity, the citizen recovered enough to raise his offer several thousand per cent. He began to enumerate the good points of the mare, her freedom from spavin, blind staggers, ringbone, botts, and the other petty ills that horseflesh is heir to. Her one eye, he said, was better'n two, and the superstition about four white feet was pure nonsense. He knew the old proverb for horse-trading — brag loudest on the weak points; the good points speak for themselves.

Lucy cut short his oration, by offering him twenty-five dollars. She had only thirty dollars left, all told, as she showed him. He closed the deal.

When Lucy saw the horse she was to ride she regretted the purchase. That horse was a mare. That mare was a fool. Her brain was too small to use even what information her one sleepy eye brought her. She was hysterical without being spirited, and her only bursts of speed were exhibited in suddenly shying from some quite imaginary object of terror. Her only strength of purpose was seen in her fixed resolve to turn every corner she came to. Besides, the only saddle to be had was a man's saddle.

But Lucy accepted her bad luck, and bettered it by thinking how much worse it might have been. The horse-trader without extra charge told her

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what roads to take; assured her that her pistol was correctly loaded, and capped it for her. He took her little foot in his two large hands and "h'isted" her into the saddle, where she clung sidewise as best she could. He took advantage of his last chance to pay off a score of grudges, and gave the mare a heavy blow on the flank. She bolted with a suddenness that almost left Lucy behind.

Lucy had enough to do clinging to that saddle and guiding that equine idiot over roads of which she knew little except that they were bad. When she felt hungry, she stopped at a farmhouse, and never failed of a hospitality that scorned her proffer of money. At night she was cared for in the same way.

The next morning she was up and away again. The farther she went, the more anxious she grew. Hungry as she became, she passed several farmhouses, because she feared to have twilight find her far from the Rebel lines. But eventually she began to sway in the saddle and grow faint.

She saw a farmhouse from whose porch dangled a Rebel flag. But she could go no farther. She slipped to the ground, fastened the horse with fingers trembling, and walked totteringly to the door. A scowling woman answered her knock, and poured out a flood of talk:

"I s'pose you are another of them Cornfedrit nurses come for more supplies. Well, you folks have got everything I can spare, and more too. First the Yankees run off all our cattle. Then the Cornfedrits comes, and my old man and my two

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boys joins 'em. Oh, we're Southern sympathisers, all right, but I ain't got nothin' left to give you."

Lucy answered, weakly, but taking a clue from the woman's uninvited disclosures:

"All I want is a little supper, and I'll pay you for that."

This mollified the woman a trifle; she invited Lucy in, and went here and there, bringing out such things as she had, — they were manna and quails to Lucy, — and rattling on the while like a stage-coach going down-hill, telling Lucy numberless things that she would have neither dared, nor thought, to ask, and finally saying, proudly:

"I reckon you think you know all about the army; well, I know a few things, too. A female lady nurse, that was here a few hours ago to git some fresh eggs and butter, asked me to bring in the evenin's milk, and she give me the countersign. You don't believe me, do you?"

"Well, it's easy to prove what you say," Lucy answered, in chills and fever of curiosity.

"Oh, I know all right; the password is 'College,' 'cause the Yankees is defendin' the college grounds this side of Lexin'ton town. There, what did I tell ye? Am I right?"

"I won't contradict you," Lucy answered, diplomatically. Then she rose to go. She carried her purse in the bosom of her gown; as she drew it out to pay for her supper, she pulled out with it a little silk flag, that fluttered to the carpet. She seized it hastily, but the woman saw it and cried:

"A Union flag! You're a spy!"

She seized Lucy with fingers like a buzzard's

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claws. But Lucy was of a sturdy frame and goodly strength. She flung the woman away, and sent her sprawling; then left her and hurried out to the gate. She untied the mare, who displayed a great coyness about letting her mount. While the horse swerved and circled in kittenish playfulness, Lucy heard the woman's voice crying:

"If you don't stop, I'll shoot."

Just as Lucy clambered over the horizon of the saddle she saw that the woman held in her hand a large army pistol. Lucy flung her foot across and bestrode the horse like a man.

She struck the mare with the reins, and clicked frantically. The old mare moved off as deliberately as ever ocean liner left its pier.

The woman fired. Lucy prayed. The bullet caused acute discomfort to a fat and vociferous pig that had no business in the front yard. The pistol kicked the hostess over backwards — a good punishment to any hostess who makes it too hard for her guests to get away.

By dint of much coaxing, Lucy got the mare to trotting. After a long while, she saw men in the distance. She resumed her sidewise position and rode on, her heart beating as Major André's must have throbbed when the three cowboys faced him.

The men proved to be the outmost pickets of the Rebel rear-guard. They were plainly illiterate and uncouth, but the word "college" exerted a beautiful influence on them. It had a far gentler effect than it used to have with Horace Greeley.

Before she knew it, Lucy was in the Rebel lines.

But these lines were like a certain notorious resort for evil characters: it was easier getting in than out.

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IV.

LUCY went some distance before she met any more soldiers. Those who looked suspicious were diverted by the words, "I have the countersign;" those who looked troublesome grew chivalrous at the words, "I am a nurse." She must needs ask many questions and yet suppress suspicion.

To ask questions about something utterly unknown, and yet to give the look of merely asking to be reassured about something very familiar, takes a deal of managing. The problem gave Lucy a headache.

One young Southern officer, an assistant surgeon (Captain Grundy, as she learned), volunteered to escort her on her way. He was very gallant, but not too chivalric to be curious, and to ask questions that kept Lucy's mind as alert as a fox beset by hounds. By changing the subject when his questions came too close to the limits of her little knowledge, and by asking him various questions that concealed a hungry curiosity under a languid interest, and by blaming to a woman's hopelessness in army matters such slips as she could not but blunder into, she lulled the cavalier's suspicions and learned much that was of vital importance to her.

"So you are with General Price," said Captain Grundy. "He is a ve'y magnetic gentleman, Ah

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undehstand; good fighteh, too; but he's a little too hahd on his men, I feah. He wanted to take Lexin'ton befo' we could get up to reinfo'ce him. They tell me that he mahched his men so furiously that lots of 'em had neitheh sleep nor food for thutty-six houahs. Is that true?"

"I'm afraid it is," murmured Lucy, to whom all this was news.

"No wondeh that low Irish Abolitionist in Lexington, Mulligan, drove him back. That day's fightin' must have brought you ladies a terrible lot of wuk."

"It did, indeed," said Lucy, and added, sincerely, "Poor boys!"

"But you've had five days to patch up the pieces, and with all of ouah reinfo'cements, General Price must have about twenty-five thousand men in all, and Mulligan they say has hardly three thousand; we've got him choked off by riveh, too. He can't budge, and he'll have to stahve or surrender, or we'll kill every black Republican he's got. If he knows his business, he'll do what the 'coon did when he saw old Davy Crockett after him with a gun; he'll say, 'Don't shoot, General Price, Ah'll come right down.' — Well, heah's where the lines of ouah brigade end. It's getting ve'y dahk, and you ought to be back with youah brigade. Of co'se you know their countersign. It's different from ouah's, Ah presume. Good night. Ah hope to see you again."

Lucy thanked him, and went on with only the stars as chaperons. They looked a trifle too far away to be of much help, and their bland, blinking eyes did not seem to betray much intelligence. So

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Lucy felt bereft of friends, beset with foes, afraid to turn either way. She, the resolute, the indomitable, realised that after all she was only a young girl, away from home, in a strange country, among enemies, and, almost worse than anything else, — she was in the dark.

What her cavalier had told her of the separate countersign the brigade in advance was likely to have, had taken away the key she had to the postern-gate in the long wall between her and John.

Then she had heard of the skulkers, the prowlers, that hang about the outskirts of armies, desperate, ruffianly minds that demand something sneaking for their trade.

At length the moon rose, old and wan, and the roads were easier riding, though the shadows seemed all the denser. The road dipped to cross a stream. Where the moonbeams brushed the ripples they turned into restless little cups of quicksilver. The old mare stopped short knee-deep in the water, and drank. Lucy bent over, and scooped up in her bridle-chafed hand cool refreshment for her dusty throat.

Out of a shadow she heard a voice, all ghostly. She grasped her pistol in alarm. But the voice simply said:

"You're lucky to have a hoss, pordner. We-uns have gotter foot it."

There was something so inoffensive about the tone that Lucy answered:

"I'm sorry for you."

Another voice said to the first voice:

"By the old Harry, it's a woman!" The two

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voices sank to the sussurus of whispers. Then, after a few oaths, the first voice said:

"Here, young girl, we need that hoss wuss'n you do. You just git down and give him to us, an' there won't be no trouble."

"Yes, miss, we hates to hurt a lady, but—"

They started to walk toward her, like two pillars of smoke in the moon-filled air. Their feet threw up little geysers of quicksilver where they splashed. They were reaching for her bridle before Lucy could speak. Then she cried:

"I'll shoot you if you come an inch nearer."

One of the men fell back; the other sneered:

"I hope ye ain't skeart of a fool woman. She couldn't hit anything even if she had anything to shoot with."

He seized her bridle. She leaned forward grimly, and shot into the vague shadow he was. The horse reared, she clutched his mane to save herself from being thrown. The man fell into the water with a cry ending in a gurgle. The horse splashed noisily across the stream. In the silence of the dust of the other side, Lucy heard a voice gasping:

"Help me—Bill—I'm drownding!"

She rode on, praying that the wretch might not die.

She forgot him as she thought of the countersign that would be demanded of her. She had not the faintest idea what to do. To rush past the sentinel and risk being shot was a ruse to be feared, only because it would alarm the whole camp and get her quickly discovered.

Her mind groped about in space with long tenta-

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cles seeking a scheme as an octopus seeks prey. But none of the ideas swimming about in space fed her need. Still something impelled her on and on through the dark where the old horse felt the way stumblingly. When the night was doubly dense from the moon's absence behind a cloud — "Halt, who goes there?"

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V.

THE disembodied voice so shocked her that her tongue could not move to say, "A friend;" her hand could not check the old mare's slow progress.

"Who goes there? I say. Stop or I'll shoot."

In sheer weakness she slipped from her saddle and dropped to the ground. The bridle fell from her hand. She grasped at it, missed it; the horse shied and leaped away from her, then walked toward the sentinel, stopping here and there to nibble a tuft of grass.

Lucy waited in complete hopelessness. The sentinel, puzzled at the strange loitering of the enemy, hesitated to shoot. Lucy stole out of the road into the bushes alongside.

At length the sentinel raised his gun to fire. From a cloud the moon shot like a huge incandescent cannon-ball.

The sentinel saw that the horse was riderless. He came forward, seized it by the bridle, and called loudly for the guard.

The patrol came trotting along from the guard-tent. The corporal of the guard guffawed:

"Tankersley's ketched a new recruit. His ears ain't long enough, though, to put him in your class."

The relief held a few minutes of inquest over the

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estray, and laughed and quarrelled as to whose it should be.

Before they had finished their council of war Lucy had stealthily crossed the line, unseen.

The rest of the night she spent in making her way through the camp. Perhaps her caution was excessive, but not always. She spent one hour lying coiled up under a bush that scratched and bruised her, while the officer of the guard and the officer of the day paced up and down near her discussing the state of affairs, the weather, the latest stories, camp gossip, anything to kill time. When the sleepless officer of the day thought he might elude insomnia, he turned in; the officer of the guard returned to the guard-tent.

Lucy spent another hour working her way down a company street with moonlit tents like huge gravestones. In some of the tents soldiers were awake and talking in low tones, cursing the Yankees, the rheumatism, and the officers, indiscriminately. As she huddled near one tent, one of its occupants yelled:

"I see you! I see you! Say your prayers quick, for I'm goin' to kill you."

Lucy died ten deaths before she learned that the man's speech was only the maundering of a nightmare.

At length, when her aching eyes told her that the night must be nearly gone, she found herself outside the camp. She quickened her pace and ran, bending far over. Again that bullet-like cry:

"Who goes there?"

She dropped prone beside a log and waited. A

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picket came running in her direction, crashing through the bushes, and threatening to shoot. He stopped right in front of her sheltering log and waited. She could hear him breathe. She could almost see his keen gaze. She prayed that he had no owl's vision to find her in the gloom.

He stepped on the log; it rolled under him; he put one foot forward on the ground; it fell on Lucy's left hand, and the hob-nailed heel crushed her fingers into the earth. She buried her lips in the moss to smother the cry of anguish that leaped there.

A chill fore-dawn wind came vaulting through the air. The bushes squirmed beneath it. The sentinel made a dash at one bush. With musket clubbed he belaboured it. Then he looked beneath to find his prey, and found only shattered branches.

"I s'pose it was only the damned wind. Seems almost human," he muttered, talking to himself for company.

He returned to his post, and Lucy, weeping silently for her poor hand hurt to excruciation, crawled slowly, snakily across the post, cowering for minutes before what seemed inevitable discovery, finding herself where she could reach out and touch the sentinel — if she had been so inclined — and at last scuttering swiftly on all fours in the free space between lines.

Dawn came at last, lighting up the east behind her. In the counter-dawn that lit the west, she saw the college building silhouetted on the high hill. Over the breastworks flew two banners, the glorious

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stars and stripes, and the gleaming green flag of Ireland.

And now the problem was to escape being shot by her own friends. The new problem was no less dangerous than the old. And the old was still present.

The two picket-lines of the Union and Confederate troops almost touched. And the pickets had exchanged newspapers, chewing-tobacco, persiflage, or bullets, according to the state of mood and weather. But the siege of Lexington was now in so parlous a state that the pickets chiefly swapped shots. And they were gentlemen of great nicety and promptness of aim.

At length, when the daylight was abroad everywhere, Lucy determined to take all risks.

She found a large boulder, crawled round it, and using it as a shield between her and the Rebel lines, waved frantically a white handkerchief through which she had thrust a dead branch. At length a Federal picket saw her, and rose to signal her in. As he did, his hat went flying with a Confederate bullet in it. He dropped as if he had been actually shot. The prospect of the gauntlet was not reassuring.

There was a long silence, and Lucy wondered if Fate were going to play her the low trick of killing her at the very door-sill of her ambition.

At length a white flag rose from the Union lines. Shortly after an officer rose, waving it uneasily. Finding himself alive, he came forward toward Lucy. When he reached her he lifted a jaunty cap,

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and said, in a voice mellowed with Irish brogue and unction:

"Good marnin' to ye, miss — I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance. But what can we do for you? It's not in very good shape we are to resave callers to-day."

"Is Colonel Mead in your lines?"

"Colonel Made, is it? The wounded officer? Yis, that he is, but not for long, I'm t'thinkin'."

"I have come to find him — to nurse him back to health."

"Och, now, that's turrible sad. I'm afeard you are too l— but, onyway, it would be insane for you to come in our lines. We are foightin' a desprit foight in the almosht vain hope of reinforcements. The Rebels have taken the town of Lexin'ton, and we are cooped up in these colludge grounds. We are short of bullets, and short of powdher, and absolutely widthout wather, except what we can catch from the shkies in blankets when it is koind enough to rain a little for us. And we're very short of food even for sojers to ate — to say nothin' of sweet-mates for the denty palates of the loikes of you, colleen."

"I must find Colonel Mead," Lucy answered, firmly.

"We had three t'thousand harses and mules; the most of them are loyin' dead about the camp. Belave me, miss, they — they do not make a rose-gairden of the place."

"Please take me to Colonel Mead."

"Faith, I will gladly sind you under escort into the villudge. The Confidruts will trate ye with

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courtesy. They are gintlemen, and do not foight women."

"I implore you, take me to Colonel Mead," said Lucy. "If you will not, I will go alone."

The captain's eyes tried in vain to express both his sorrow and his admiration. He offered her his arm and led her out into the open.

The Confederates, who had been consumed with curiosity and impatience at this long parley, saw with amazement a somewhat shabbily foppish officer and a much dishevelled and dusty-robed woman promenading into the Federal lines as if they were on the beach-walk of a summer resort. Over the officer's shoulder the white flag hung, as if it were the lady's parasol.

For some reason or other, most of the spectators cheered.

Lucy had had no breakfast. She was faint from sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, anxiety, and the nerve-slump that follows when any goal is reached. When she entered the elaborate breastworks the soldiers had so busily dug and upheaved, she found a small army of haggard, wistful, distraught men still delving busily.

The officer volunteered to show her to the hospital. They picked their way past a building rent and gashed and gutted with shell and fire, through a nauseous débris of lacerated and noisome mules and horses, splintered wagons, boxes, scattered and rotting stores swarming with flies. She leaned heavily on the captain and closed her eyes.

At length she saw a yellow flag floating over a battered residence.

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"That is the horsepital," the captain said. "If you will pairdon me, I'll get back to me posht. The day's work is about to begin." A cannon boomed, a shell shrilled. "Yis, theer gaws the whistle." A hospital orderly appeared. "Take this leddy to Colonel Made; and Captain Gla'son's compliments to um for havin' the int'rest of so brave and so beautiful a leddy."

He lifted his hat and turned away. A shell struck just in front of him, and Lucy gave him up for dead.

Out of the cloud of dust and smoke, he appeared, brushing his clothes. He sang out to Lucy, with a laugh:

"Arrah, 'twas a good line shot, but a troifle too low."

"Poor Colonel Mead is asleep just now," the orderly said, gently, with condolence in eyes and voice. "It's a mercy when he sleeps."

Now that she was in the very presence of John, who had eluded her like a ghost, and of whose probable fate every one had warned her, Lucy was afraid to move. She stood trembling with fear. The haunting spirit that had dogged her steps in every form now weighed on her with visions of the grave. The place reeked with the stench of a shambles. She shivered in impotent dread.

A wild, maniacal yell came from the hospital. There was a scurry of feet, noise of a scuffle, blows, groans, and over all the harsh, clamorous voice of John Mead; the old accents familiar still though all distorted with lunatic frenzy and unfamiliar rage.

Lucy followed the orderly quickly as he darted

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inside. She saw him fling himself on a group struggling to drag down a towering demon. For all the wild matted hair and the long scraggly beard that had grown upon his unshaved face, Lucy recognised John.

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VI.

THE gentleness was gone from John's look, as from his voice. He was living over again his ruthless, desperate fight with "Pig" Schimmelpfennig. This combat merged soon into another memory. Now he was only a boy struggling against the old school teacher, Clinton, and was pinned to the floor. Now his voice ceased to rave. It sank to a whisper:

"It's little Lucy Darr; she's holding his hand so he can't hit me. Oh, the blessedness of her heart!"

He fell back whispering and smiling inanely. The knot of men who had been holding him lowered him gently to his cot, where he lay at peace.

The surgeon, whose lip was swollen from a blow of John's fist, turned to Lucy in surprise. He seemed to understand the tragedy in her weary face. He said, half hysterically:

"Poor fellow! You see — you see he's killing himself, and we can't stop him. The pain drives him mad. Then he exhausts himself. If we poor doctors could only find some way of checking fevers, we'd save so many lives. And we'd save ourselves a million heartaches."

He went slowly out, humiliated at the helplessness of his science.

Lucy hurried to John's side. A soldier brought her a chair. She sat down and stared at him, recog-

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nising him only by her mighty love for the soul that was struggling within, as a wild bird beats itself to death against a cage. John whispered and sighed, quietly, and she could not tell what he was dreaming of. She put her hand — her cool white hand — upon his forehead, corrugated and scarlet with fever. She leaned over him, and the tears fell on her hand and his forehead. And he sighed deliciously:

"The rose-bush! — the rain on the roses! Lucy, a kiss — another kiss — I love you — no, I mustn't tell you. I'm too poor. And you're so young and so beautiful. You mustn't waste your youth and your beauty on me."

Lucy's overstrained self-control broke down. She cried aloud, and bending her head to his breast, wept madly.

John unclenched his eyes, stared at her, thrust her away, growling:

"Who are you? — who are you? Go away! I was dreaming of Lucy Darr — I forgot all the pain! Why did you wake me? Oh, my God, my head! my head! I'll go mad if I think of my wounds. I mustn't think of them. I mustn't want to die. I must think only of something beautiful. I must think only of Lucy Darr — only of Lucy Darr!"

Under the soothing smoothness of Lucy's hand the torment gradually melted away from his soul and his wounds, and he slept like a child.

When she was well assured that he was in the ineffable luxury of pure sleep, she rose stealthily and tiptoed away, more cautious of noise than when she stole through the Rebel camp and had only

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her own self to risk. She moved about, tidying her neglected person and learning the place. She found other rooms where sick and wounded were crowded on cots and beds. John's violence had earned him a place apart. Her large heart found room for sympathy for those other wretches, too, racked each with his own distress of mind and body, each wondering at a woman's presence in such an inferno, each devouring her with such amazeful eyes as the damned in hell turned upon Dante and Vergil.

Lucy helped them all as best she could, as only a woman could. There was far more for her to do than any woman could, and much that many a woman would shrink from doing. But she braved all things through, and the place began to brighten, as a patch of weeds and bushes when among them a wild rose dawns upon its thorny stem.

Incessantly Lucy looked in upon John and rejoiced to find him still sleeping babyishly. There was almost more of the mother in her heart than of the lover now. She thought of John's mother waiting with idle hands, her heart chafing at her helpless sloth. She thought of her own mother, and wished there were some way of letting her know how nearly happy she was here where her duty and every desire called her.

At length John began to stir, to mutter uneasily. She hastened to him, and with a cool wet cloth refreshed his face and his throat, and cleansed his lean and nervous hands. She combed and brushed away the anarchy of his hair; gave him a clean, cool pillow, and made a new man of him altogether.

He stared at her as her agile, delicious hands flew

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here and there about him; he mused upon her as only one of his long parade of dreams. She stared back into his foggy eyes, trying to pierce to his soul with the meaning of her love, her hope, her determination. So their gazes blended a long, long while.

Then he said to her, lazily:

"Do you know you remind me of the most beautiful, the noblest girl in all this world."

"And who is that?" Lucy asked, anxiously.

There was a long silence; then he murmured:

"You remind me of a girl named Lucy Darr."

"I am Lucy Darr."

This knowledge stole on his soul as music seeps into a dream. It was such rapture to him, that he could only breathe a sigh of mighty luxury, carry her hand to his lips, cuddle it under his cheek, and — sleep again.

Her hand and arm also went to sleep as he held her there, immovable as a sphinx lest she call him back to his pain. In the long stillness she realised for the first time that a battle was going on all round the beleaguered hill. Battery after battery poured in its wares, and sharpshooters crawled closer and closer to pick off any defender that showed his head. Lucy through the window could see the shells soar up like great black gulls, hover, and swoop to earth with a mad cry. Few of them came near the hospital, but now and then her heart held still in her breast as she thought the place was doomed. Once a chimney was carried away, once a bursting shell threw dust and pebbles in at the open window where she sat. It seemed to say, "The next time I'll get you

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sure." Most of all she feared that John would wake, for the surgeon had said that sleep and ease were the only medicines that could save him.

In the room across the hall she heard a man groaning louder and louder. Then he began to whimper like a little girl afraid in her cradle. Then he began to blubber like an overgrown boy birched for his deserts. Lucy grew more and more anxious lest he wake John; so anxious that she felt little pity for the wretch in the next room.

Finally she could endure his wails no longer; she cautiously slipped her aching hand from John's grasp without waking him, and went across the hall. Through the window she could see the tawny Missouri River, pushing along a heavy load of mud it could hardly keep moistened. This is the river of which one said: "When the wind blows across the Missouri it raises a cloud of dust." This might have been the one of which another said: "I have never before noticed how greatly water improves the appearance of a river."

On the other bank was ugly bottom land. The dirty river banks were huge mud pies under the baking sun. The river, swirling and stewing like a heavy broth, was no vision of beauty to Lucy's eyes; but a sick soldier had propped himself on a window-sill, and was gazing at it as if it flowed milk and honey. His name was Josh Wildrick. And he bobbed up and down on his sobs. The burden of Joshua's wail was fish.

He was convalescent from typhoid fever, and he had the frantic food-caprice of a woman near her time.

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When Lucy asked the cause of the man's distress, he said:

"They must be a pile of catfish in that there river. All I want is jest one goldarned measly little feller to eat. I can jest hear it a-gigglin' in Maw's skillet, an' if somebody don't ketch me one and fry it quick, I'll jest everlastin'ly go up the spout."

"But, you see, the Rebels hold the river front, and we can't get near the water, much as we need it." Lucy explained. The invalid broke out more peevishly:

"That's whut the simpleton of a doctor said. But why don't they send a regimunt down there and drive them Rebels back long enough to ketch me a fish? I'd show 'em if I could only walk. I want fish. It's the only thing I want. Why can't I have it? They's nothin' cheaper'n catfish, and nothin' better fer sick folks. Why, oh, why can't I have a fish?"

There was no way of quieting him, and Lucy had to close the door in John's room. This cut off what little breeze was loafing about, and the heat was stifling. Lucy sat fanning John. There was no water to moisten cooling cloths for his head. But still through the closed door came faintly the moan:

"Gimme fish or gimme death!"

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VII.

THE next day John woke late. He had slept through the long night without stirring. In a large chair at his side, Lucy had slept as soundly, the merciful night bringing also a cool and crooning wind.

In the morning, John seemed his old self save for his weakness. He poured out to Lucy his gratitude. He listened to the story of her quest of him with wondering admiration. The least details of the gossip of Darrville life, his mother's welfare and her message to him, he drank in as if they were the purple chronicle of old empires.

Only once his delirium fastened on him again, and Lucy restrained him where the squad of men had failed before.

But well as things went in the hospital for the two lovers, the straits were sore for the commander of this little Thermopylæ, Colonel Mulligan, who added a new chapter to the fiery pages of Irish soldiering. The multitudinous Confederates took turns in harassing his men, who were too few to be divided into watches. Food was wanting, water was lacking to quench the triple thirst of work and war in stifling trenches under a fiendish sun, with gunpowder smoke biting their parched and swollen tongues. But still the Irishman fought on, in spite of his two wounds, in spite of the flabby courage of

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some of his troops, and the petitions to surrender that many of his own officers besieged him with. The men he had sent to entreat reinforcements had been captured. This he feared, but could not know. He could only fight on.

Now the Confederates grew desperate at the frequence with which their onsets were pushed back by the garrison; and finally so vexed that they decided to make an attempt on the bluff where the hospital flaunted, as a sacred appeal for mercy, its yellow flag. The Red Cross flag was not yet born.

Lucy, as she sat by the window fanning John, who was rivalling Rip Van Winkle as a sleeper, noted some consternation in a few of the garrison, who happened to be near the hospital. They pointed down to the west. A few of them gathered and ran thither, gesticulating. Lucy guessed that the Rebels were going to storm the bluff from that direction.

Bullets began to patter here and there like the preliminary skirmish of a March rain. The rain turned to sleet, and this to the pelting hail of a blizzard. Lucy, from her safe shelter, hearing these wasted shots tapping here and there, was realising how spendthrift of bullets even the best soldiers are. The noise seemed to act as a lullaby on John. He slept — violently.

But from across the hall there came howls of terror, and now and then a yelp of pain, announcing that some one had been hit.

Something seemed to order Lucy to the side of the helpless targets of spent bullets. A long look at John showed him still garnering in the fruits of slumber. She tiptoed out and closed the door after

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her. A bullet nipped the bow-knot in her hair. She had often wondered what it felt like to be under fire. She was too busy to analyse her mood. She was absorbed in pity for the wretches on the cots. One fever-wrecked lad was deliriously grinning at his hand, whence a shot had just splintered the thumb.

Joshua Wildrick was fishing for safety under his cot.

Two hopeless gamblers, a legless young man and an armless old man, were betting imaginary sums on the destination of each next ball.

Lucy hastily bandaged the hand of the delirious boy. She spoke in a motherly tone of reassurance to the fisherman under the cot. She received the ironic reproof of the gamblers when she laboriously tugged a large open wardrobe in front of one of the windows. She drew a blanket over the face of a man whose yelp of pain had been his farewell utterance. She brought a little precious water to the toasted lips of an invalid who was hoping that a merciful bullet might take him out of his misery. In a corner, all a-huddle, she found one man kneeling and praying with rabid lips slavered with fright. When he saw her, he hunched forward on his knees, and seizing her skirts, hid his face in them, imploring her to protect him. His speech had the staccato of the telegraph; he was explaining:

"I wan't afraid like this when I was fighting. Colonel Mulligan said I was the pluckiest man of the lot the day I was hit." One of the other soldiers nodded assent to this, and the wretch babbled on: "But I've been layin' here with nothin' to do

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but think and think. And I've been thinkin' of what my father used to tell me. He was a preacher — a hard-shell Baptist, you know — and I was — well, you know what they say of preachers' boys. Well, Paw used to say that I'd pay for my sins in hell-fire everlasting. But I used to laugh and go on doin' everything the Devil wanted me to. And now he's comin' to claim me. I can see his eyes, and they burn like two red-hot pokers, and I can feel his hoofs treadin' on me, and he's only waitin' for a bullet to turn me over to him for good. Oh, Paw told me of the brimstone, and the live coals, and the sulphur; and they'll burn me for ever and ever, and the more I pray to die, the more they'll heap the coals on me. Oh, my God, don't let the Devil get to me to-day! If Thou wilt only let me live, I'll be good, I'll never do nothing wicked again. I'll be a preacher and warn others. Oh, Miss Darr, I'll die, I'll die! and the fiery furnace will be my home for all eternity. Oh, I'm doomed! I'm doomed! Hell is yawning for me. I can see the blazes. I can hear 'em roaring and licking out their tongues for me. Oh, can't you, can't you do or say something for me?"

Lucy looked sternly into his wavering eyes, and answered:

"You say you were plucky in the fight the other day? Well, brace up now! And if you must go to hell, go to hell like a man!"

He looked into her eyes with desperate query. Then knit his brow, set his teeth hard, and threw back his head bravely. At the very moment, a bullet cut through the fold of Lucy's skirt where

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he still clutched it, and he went over with a shattered heart. His eyes fastened sturdily on Lucy, till she herself closed them.

Meanwhile, the famous Rebel yell grew louder, more blood-curdling as it neared. The handful of troops that had gathered to protect the hospital fell back, stopping to shoot from behind a dead mule, an empty barrel, or any shelter; then they ran for the next cover. Some of them never reached this, but sprawled with twitching hands and lay still.

Then the Rebels appeared, following the same tactics that the Americans learned at such cost from the Indians. Their numbers and their confidence grew, and their way to the very core of the citadel seemed clear.

Lucy hurried back to John's bedside, just as the Rebels came tramping into the hospital, taking possession of the rooms, and making all the inmates prisoners. John was still doggedly a-dream, when an officer burst into the room. Lucy rose, her finger on her lip, and whispered, pointing to John:

"Please leave us. If he wakes he may die."

The officer hesitated, caught off his hat, bowed low, and tiptoed out, closing the door after him very gently. Lucy locked the door. Then, drawn to the window by the fascination of the scene, she saw in the distance, half a mile away, and down the slope, that the main body of the garrison was hastily improvising a counter-attack. Two companies — craven militia-men — were formed, but broke up in disorder. A new line was formed. Lucy could see how small this force was: eighty men in all. In the lead were a form and uniform that seemed famil-

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iar. As they came nearer she saw it was Captain Gleason.

Like an Irish thunderbolt of war, the Montgomery Guards smote the Rebel advance, and clove through it, and withered it. The Confederates, breathless from the climb and the swift success, were upset and bewildered by the vim of the retort. Their line, crumpled and disorganised, was forced backward. Some of the men in the rear took shelter behind various objects as the garrison had done before. One Rebel sharpshooter halted in front of the very window where Lucy waited spellbound. His own men cut off his aim. He looked about for a higher perch, saw the window, clambered through, and, blinded to the dark after the glare outside, never saw Lucy. He knelt in front of her, laid his musket on the window-ledge, and looked keenly for the most shining mark. In childish glee, he spoke aloud:

"Oh, I reckon that's their captain. Golly, how he fights! Well, here's good-bye to you, Cap."

He laid his cheek lovingly against the stock, his finger caressed the trigger till the sights were just aligned on the mark. Before he could fire, the barrel was caught up, and he heard a woman's voice pleading:

"Oh, you mustn't shoot Captain Gleason."

He thought he was bewitched. Then he discovered the witch. With heart set on one object alone, he snatched the musket away from Lucy, and sought his aim again. Again the barrel was seized. Now, he rose in his wrath. Lucy clung to the musket with both hands and wrestled desperately. He

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twisted and flung her here and there. She went down on one knee, but still hung on, fighting silently, from an instinct to protect John's slumbers as well as the Captain's life. The Rebel began to curse. He knocked over a chair holding a large china wash-bowl.

This minor noise in the tumult woke John. He yawned gorgeously, looked about, saw what was going on, thought he was delirious again, didn't care whether it was delirium, dream, or what-not, so long as Lucy was assailed. He rose quickly; his foot touched the bowl; he bent, seized it, uplifted it to the full height of his reach; brought it down on the man's head. It was not the bowl alone that cracked.

As the Rebel fell, he left his musket in Lucy's hands. John took it from her. She was too dazed to resist. A noise at the window caught his attention. He looked out. Captain Gleason was there at bay. Three sturdy Confederate gentlemen were prodding at him with their bayonets. He was parrying their blows with a sword like a zigzag of lightning. He was addressing them with a glittering chain of oaths of Gaelic and other origins.

John shot one Rebel, and lunging far out caught another under the shoulder-blade with his toasting-fork. The third, awed by this *deus ex machina,* stood no longer on the order of his going. Captain Gleason was the most amazed of all. He looked around, saw Lucy and John, lifted his hat, exclaimed:

"Ye must pairdon me sthrong langwudge. Divil a thought I had there was leddies prisint."

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And he vanished to continue what his colonel afterward recorded as one of the most brilliant charges in history.

Instinct had driven Lucy to seize the musket from the sharpshooter. Stupefaction at John's apparition had prevented her from resisting his seizure of the gun. When she had recovered her wits, her one aim was to drive John back to his cot. She stepped forward to plead with him. He began to sway like a tree about to fall. Then over he toppled, and would have struck with a crash, had she not caught him in her arms, borne the shock of his weight, and struggled with his body across the unconscious Rebel till she could ease him to his cot.

She upbraided his chivalry. He made no answer. She put her hand on his brow. It was cold. Something warm surrounded her finger. She drew her hand away. On her finger-tips were bright drops of blood. John's struggle had ripped his bandages loose. His wounds were open afresh.

Instinct told Lucy to break down and sob out her despair. Instead, she ran to the door and called for a surgeon. There was no one to answer or aid her.

The moment she spent at the door showed her a vision of new horror; but she was too jaded to respond to it with more than a glance.

In the room across the hall a few Rebel soldiers were resisting the onslaught of a few of Gleason's men. The muskets had all been fired, and there was no time to reload; the enemies were fencing awkwardly and desperately with cumbersome bayonetted muskets. It was prod and parry, volt and

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lunge. No one thought of the wretched invalids in their beds. Here were two stalwart warriors at give and take across a cot where a helpless soldier lay; the thrusts they parried rarely missed him. He was bleeding from many a gash, and his appealing hands were knocked here and there. The cot next to him had been spilled over, and the patient lay on the floor trampled and booted by both of the men who wrestled over him for the same gun. One sick soldier rose half-naked from his tangled bedclothes and flung himself on a Rebel about to lunge at a Union soldier. The Rebel was killed, but another Rebel, running up, drove his bayonet into the invalid, who went down, still wrestling in death with his dead foeman.

In the opening and shutting of the door Lucy saw this little tableau. It was many weeks before she was sensitive to its full ghastliness. Now she was too busy. She locked the door upon the noise of scuffling, crackling muskets, griding bayonets, oaths of rage, and wild cries from the perishing non-combatants. She busied herself frantically over John. She was on her knees seeking bandages in a bureau drawer across the room from him, when a heavy weight smote the door. It bent in like canvas.

Lucy rose to her feet, and stood shivering with abject anxiety. The scene across the hall was then to be repeated here?

Again a man was hurled against the door, a bayonet split through the pine. It was wrenched loose. There was a further lull. Then another battering-ram blow that flung the door from its hinges and brought it with a thunder-clap to the

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floor. A Rebel fell backward on it. A Yankee drove at him a bayonetted gun like a javelin. Lucy sickened. But the Rebel with a squirm evaded the point of steel, grabbed the musket with one hand, and with a twist wrenched loose the bayonet at its shank.

He got to his feet with a new weapon like a short sword. The Yankee did not retreat, but, whirling his musket about, seized it near the muzzle, and let drive at the Rebel. The blow was broken by the casement of the door. He rushed in the room and dodged the slash the Rebel aimed at him. The ceiling was so low that he whirled his musket around sidewise, and the butt of it passed within an inch of the forehead of John, who lay as one dead. The musket caught the Rebel in the jaw, breaking the bone, but not striking that point of repose which the pugilist seeks. The Rebel dropped to one knee, then with a swift, low rush, closed on the Yankee, who found his musket now worse than useless, and was hard put to it to save his life by seizing the bayonet. The men fought madly now, their hands cut and bleeding on the sharp edges of the blade, while the point danced here and there, now hovering over the heart of one, now slashing the shirt of the other.

Lucy saw them gradually drifting toward John's bed. She ran round them and stood in front of her dearly beloved. As they came nearer, she tried to push them away, but they, never seeing her, kept hurtling back against her. Finally she put a hand on each side of John and cowered over him, bracing

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every muscle. The two men lurched against her, but she found strength not to bend.

Now she felt the point of the bayonet in her side. It stung and quivered there. She said prayers, rapidly, fiercely. The bayonet point was drawn along her side, cutting a long groove in her gown and flesh. Then it left her, and the struggle began again.

The fallen door rattled under more feet. The Rebel looked over his shoulder, saw two Yankees entering. He let go of the bayonet, rushed for the open window and leaped through. The three Yankees followed him with the enthusiasm of a pack of hounds.

Lucy swayed to and fro, feeling the blood trickling from her side. Her elbows gave way, her head sank on John's pillow. She sought to kiss his white, white cheek, but her knees loosened, and she slid to the floor. She rose on one elbow in a last effort, but fell again and lay motionless.

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VIII.

CAPTAIN GLEASON'S truly Irish charge catapulted the Confederates half a mile before he had condensed them to the point of resistance. When he withdrew, he was shot through the jaw, and was helped to the hospital for repairs. With him came Captain Moriarty, who had been a surgeon before he was commissioned as a fighter. When the two reached the hospital, they found that the surgeon and the orderlies, as well as the chaplain, had been carried off prisoners by the Rebels as they retreated.

Captain Moriarty, with great regret, put aside his sword, and looked for the weapons of his former profession. None were to be found. He washed out Captain Gleason's wounds with plentiful soap and a little water. He bandaged him with the sleeve of his own shirt. The rest of the shirt went later. In those ante-antiseptic days, almost the only thing to do with a wounded limb was to cut it off. For gangrene was a greedier engine of death than the cannon.

Captain Moriarty found everywhere wretches scattered round like fruit shaken from autumnal trees by a heavy wind. With wounds in the throat, the face, the lungs, the loins, there was little for the science of the time to do. Legs and arms were more easily treated.

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"The only way ye can save dthat airm of yours, me boy, is to lose it. Sure and off it comes," he would say. And the only chloroform he had was the cheery sympathy and verve of his manner.

So he went his way, solving all his problems by subtraction. And the only surgical knife he had was an old razor. Thus armed, he worked without rest for forty hours, till the Confederates, in answer to Mulligan's appeal, restored the surgeon and chaplain, who were not subject lawfully to capture.

The first room of the hospital Captain Moriarty entered, was that where Lucy and John lay, white and still. Captain Gleason had asked for the privilege of Lucy's ministration to his wound, though the speech cost him much blood and anguish. The two officers entered the room; saw the wreckage, and the two lifeless figures.

"They're bot' afther bein' kilt," groaned Captain Gleason. But Captain Moriarty was kneeling at Lucy's side. He found that she had only fainted. He examined the gash in her sweet flesh — saw with joy that it was only a surface wound. There was no water to waste bathing her temples. He chafed her hands till she came to life again, still bewildered. Captain Gleason was for complimenting her bravery and devotion. Captain Moriarty told him to shut up. Captain Moriarty examined John anxiously. He shook his head, and said, "Too bad!" He glanced at Lucy, and saw in her eye such a look as made him examine John more closely; lean down and listen to the faintly flittering heart. At length he said:

"There is hope for him, if he has careful nursing."

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Lucy almost smiled, got to her feet with Captain Gleason's aid, and, staggering to a chair, set it upright, and used it as a crutch to make her way back to the bedside. She sat down, took up the fan, and began again the drudgery with bland bravery.

Captain Moriarty said, "Faith, a saint the likes of you ought to be canonised, inshtead of cannonaded!"

The two Irishmen left the room. They looked back at her; then at each other; then upward, with a gesture of wonderment and worship. Captain Gleason, without knowing why, made the sign of the Cross.

And the siege? It went on.

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IX.

THE Confederate troops began now to push forward a movable breastwork of cotton bales. A few hot shot set some of these on fire. Then they began pouring water on them by the bucketful. This was the bitterest blow of all to the thirsty victims of the long siege.

"Saints in hiven, would ye see dthat!" growled Mulligan. "It's just shcandalous, washtin' those di'monds by the pailful on that unappraciative cotton. By the lift hoind leg of Saint Pathrick's poodle, I've got a bale of cotton in me own t'throat that could use wan of thim boockets of wather, and niver feel it goin' down."

On and on came rolling the cotton entrenchments, and still Colonel Mulligan clung to his determination to hold the place till General Frémont could reinforce it. But General Frémont had troubles of his own, and his large paper army at St. Louis had few guns, and Mulligan was doomed to meet the fate of General Lyon, who had also said his prayers toward St. Louis. There were some troops on the other side of the river, but the Confederates had carried off all the boats, and they could not cross.

The State militia did not approve of Mulligan, or his Irish notions of warfare. The officers and men, true to the shoddy militia traditions of 1812,

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thought they had done all that honour demanded. They retreated to the inner works, and there put up a white flag.

The Rebels sent a flag of truce to ask Mulligan what was the matter. Mulligan, who had not seen the militia ensign, said to the Confederate officer:

"Sure, I don't know, unless you have come to say you'll surrinder."

The Confederate laughed all the way back to his lines. Mulligan did not laugh as he sent a detachment to take down the white rag. The fight went on. The boa-constrictor of cotton closed its coil to crushing distance. The weary defenders fought doggedly till their enemies were only a few yards away, and trundling their fortress nearer every minute. Once more a militia officer raised the white flag. Colonel Mulligan saw that further resistance was insane. He accepted the meaning of the flag. The troops surrendered. In the cellar of the college were the great seal of the State, and nearly a million dollars of funds, that had been appropriated by the legislature, which had seceded without taking its State along, and later had fled from Lexington, without taking its seal or treasury along.

The Confederates had not been all this time recapturing the hospital. They had retaken it shortly after Captain Gleason's charge.

They found Lucy at John's side. One of the Confederate surgeons turned out to be the young cavalier, Captain Grundy, who had escorted her through the Rebel camp. He was much chagrined at finding he had wasted so much gallantry on a Northern woman. He accused Lucy of being a spy.

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"I had only one aim on earth," Lucy said, drearily: "to come to nurse this man, Colonel Mead, back to life. I have only one desire: to stay by his side till he is well."

The surgeon, politely adamant, replied:

"I'll say nothing of the manneh in which you obtained and used ouah passpoht, though the lady you got it from made violent complaints. But mah sense of duty fo'bids permitting you to remain in ouah lines any longeh."

"But Colonel Mead must have attention. He needs a woman's care," Lucy pleaded.

"I assuah you, he shall have every attention — and woman's care. We also have lady nusses. Colonel Mead is too valuable a prisoneh for us to squandeh, I assuah you. We can exchange him for a kyunnel or for fifteen private soldiers; perhaps for moah, in view of his fame as a fighteh."

Lucy's appeals, cajolings, arguments, prayers were all in vain. Captain Grundy would escort her into Lexington, and arrange for her passage through the lines for her own home. He promised to explain her desertion to John as soon as he could stand the shock. John was sleeping heavily. Lucy kissed his forehead, once for his mother's love and twice for her own. Then her tears poured blindingly down her cheeks and she sobbed brokenheartedly.

Captain Grundy began to grow restless, to snap his fingers uneasily, to swallow lumps in a long series, to bat his eyelids with violence, and to shake from them drops of dew. Finally he burst out:

"Oh, hang it, Miss What-eveh-yo'-name-is, I

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kyan't be a brute. Stay heah and nuss the man, and I — I'll kill anybody that attempts to distuhb you."

He was gone before she could thank him. But he came again and again.

There was no dearth of water now, and supplies were more easily to be had. Food and drink were no longer so priceless, and both John and Lucy began to improve and grow rosier.

After ten days of this life, Captain Grundy came to inform Lucy that to his great regret General Price was going to leave Lexington. The prisoners and wounded would be left under guard. The army marched away, and Lucy and John bade the young surgeon good-bye with genuine regret.

The looks and bearing of the guard they were now entrusted to did not diminish this regret. The guard did not relish being left behind to the cheap and boresome task of tending prisoners, especially as it was rumoured that General Frémont was at last on the move, and was going to mop up the State with the Rebel armies. The guard began to chafe and to vent their uneasiness on the unfortunate prisoners.

Early one morning, after two weeks of insult and ill-treatment, as Lucy sat near her window, she heard two hangdog Arkansas "crackers" discussing their ills.

"Got any chewin' on yo'?" There was a pause, evidently for the purpose of biting off a large hunk of tobacco and rolling it into place in the cheek. There was no foolish waste of thanks beyond a grunt and the return of the plug.

"If we-all hangs 'round yer a few days longeh,

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them gol-dem Yanks'll git us sho." Lucy's face lighted up. "We-uns hed orter jine Gin'ral Price, stid o' roostin' yur. I 'listed fer to fight, not to tote no muskit like a orn'ry overseer watchin' a gang of niggehs."

The other voice answered: "Well, I'll jine anybody what wants to bust loose. This is too much like workin' and not 'nough like fightin' to suit me."

The first voice: "Well, I'm right smart glad yo'll jine we-uns. I been a-talkin' to a pack of men, and they's most all of my min'. Some of our-alls non-commissioned officers has agreed to bust loose with us."

"So fur, so good. But we cain't leave these gol-dem prisoners to fall into the Yankee hands."

"But nuther kin we take 'em along with us."

"Co'se not."

There was a long silence.

"Well, ef yo' cain't take 'em and yo' cain't leave 'em —"

"I didn't say nothin' 'bout jes' leavin' 'em."

"Whut might yo' mean?"

"D' yo' eveh heah whut the Injuns useter do with prisonehs that wuz too tiahd or too lame to skedaddle?"

"Whew!" A soft whistle of awe.

"It's the only thing we-all kin do. 'Tain't nowise different from killin' 'em in battle."

"That's so. Seems kind o' onperfessional, tho'."

"Well, I thought it was kind o' onperfessional when that thar Kyunnel Mead got up off a sick-bed to crack a worsh-bowl oveh my haid. I been itchin'

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to git even with him, but the officers threatened to shoot me ef I teched him. My time'll come, tho'. We-all have agreed that when the fust dahk night comes we-uns'll bust loose. We won't take no prisonehs with us; and we won't leave no recruits for the Yanks. Humph! Skussly! Well, I'm powerful glad you'll jine we-uns. Some of the fellers hung back. But we'll fo'ce the other'ns to jine us."

"Whut abo't that woman that tends on Kyunnel Mead?"

"I reckon we might take her along with we-uns. She's dum purty."

"That's so, podner. I'm agreeable."

"Yo' air agreeable, eh? Humph! Don't fo'git I seen her fust."

"Don' fo'git I seen her second."

The two men grinned, and separated as they saw two officers approaching. The look of these officers was not reassuring to Lucy. The guard left at Lexington were such dregs as may pollute any community; neither North nor South were innocent of them.

Lucy saw at a glance that such officers would never resist their men in any moods of atrocity, but rather

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X.

LUCY tiptoed about the room in a tangle of perplexity.

She stopped short. Stared hard. Rubbed her eyes. Wondered if she had lost her mind.

There, suspended in the air, was a flapping, slimy monster, with a wide, cruel mouth, overhung with horns and tentacles.

She stared at it in terror and confusion.

A loud guffaw burst through the window, and Joshua Wildrick looked in, laughing as hugely and rurally as a Silenus.

"Haow's that fer a catfish?" he roared.

"Is that thing a catfish?" Lucy asked.

"In course it is. Whadjer s'pose it was; the Old Nick?"

"It looks like him," said Lucy. John was awake, and smiling drowsily and hungrily on the fish, which, as it hung from Joshua's pole and line, seemed to swim in the air.

"How'd you get it?" John asked.

"Wall, it never clumb up here to me. I jes' naturally hed to go daown to the old Missoura River and yank him aout. One of the Johnny Rebs went along. He tuck his muskit to shoot me if I run or swum, and I tuck a piece of cord, and cut a hickory limb, and dug up a fishin' worm, stuck him on a piece of wire, and ketched a hull pile of beauties. Them fish jest fairly fit fer the honour of swimmin' in your

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skillet, Miss Lucy. I ketched seven fish, and gin three to the Johnny Reb, an' I tuk three. And me and the Johnny Reb elected this here feller as the biggest and fattest, and we jined in on persentin' him to you."

Lucy smiled with delight, forgetting for the nonce her anxiety. Over Joshua's shoulder she could see a gaunt Kentucky mountaineer grinning sheepishly. He took off his hat, or rather rubbed it off his tousled wool, and swept the ground with it. Then he held up a bandaged finger, which she recognised as a bit of her own patchwork. His gallantry was explained. She did not know that he was one of those who had refused to join the plot to slay the prisoners; nor that he had silently resolved to die fighting, if needs must, to shelter her and her lover from his own fellow soldiers.

Lucy thanked the two anglers heartily, and invited them to help her cook the fish.

The Kentuckian looked sad, and shook his head.

Joshua explained. "The Johnny is s'posed to be doin' guard-dooty. He's gotter git back to his post. Hain't ye?"

The Rebel nodded, bowed low again to Lucy, and walked away, not resuming his hat till he was almost out of sight.

Lucy asked Joshua to come with her, and prepare the fish. As he was cleaning it, she explained to him hastily what she had heard of the plot.

Joshua was rash in the exuberance of new health. He was for wiping out the guard single-handed. But he grew more sober as he realised the true size of the problem.

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At length Lucy said:

"The only possible hope is to get help from outside. The guard is small, and a quick dash might overpower it, and save us. If you could only get through the lines, you might stumble on help somewhere. There are Union troops moving all about the State."

"There is also a few Rebs movin' here and there," mumbled Joshua. "Still, howsomedever, bein' ez it is the only thing wuth tryin', I'll take a whack at it. I'd ought to have a shootin'-iron of some kind, though."

Lucy managed to smuggle into his hand her pistol, which had not been discovered by the Confederates. It gave her a shudder to let it go, remembering, as she did, the veiled meanings of the last words she had heard from the Arkansas guerrillas. But it was win all or lose all; she must bet everything to win anything.

Joshua bade her good-bye.

"Ef I don't git back in time, Miss Lucy, it'll be becuz they've ketched me or killed me, or becuz I'm still huntin' fer Union soldiers to bring back. I won't give up whilst there's a drap of blood er a ounce of fight in me. I'm goin' to tell that Johnny Reb friend of mine that I know where there's a punkin patch, and that I'll sneak out of the lines and steal him one. I'm afeared he'll git purty hongry waitin' fer me to come back. So long, Miss Lucy! Take good keer yerself, and don't let go yer holt on Prov'dunce."

He dawdled carelessly down the hill. She watched from the window across the hall. She saw him

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approach the Kentuckian sentinel, borrow a chew of tobacco from him, gossip, swap jokes, and laugh uproariously in pantomime. She fretted at his deliberation. Finally, she saw the Kentuckian looking cautiously about. He then shoved Joshua hastily across the line into a clump of bushes.

Lucy saw something move in the bushes. The Kentuckian sauntered his post carelessly. In time a patrol relieved him, and placed another sentinel on guard there. By and by the Kentuckian shuffled up to the window. He struggled for speech for fully fifteen minutes. Then he said:

"Do you-uns like punkin pie?" He laughed till he almost shook the clapboards loose. "'Case if you-uns does, 'tain't onlikely you-uns might git some 'fore long." He staggered away, laughing.

John began to smack his chops epicuriously.

"Don't get your hopes up," was all Lucy said. Which made him sulky.

His health must be getting better; his temper was getting so much worse. But Lucy was thinking only of the vindictive spleen of events.

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XI.

MAJOR FRANK J. WHITE, of the Prairie Scouts, was sullen; and his troops were seedy. Things had been going wrong for the Union cause all through Missouri, and his men were chafing at having no share, even in the defeats. They had done a vast amount of scouting, hard riding, hard faring, and hard swearing, and all to no visible purpose. Yet here they were, like wrecks of a glorious campaign. The men were saddle-sore, and so were the horses. The horses were without shoes, and the men without ammunition. The rough roads had worn out the horses' shoes, the heavy rains had swept away and rotted the ammunition.

Major White asked if there were any blacksmiths among his troopers. There were a few. He set them to work patching up horseshoes out of such old scrap-iron as he could find. He seized a carpenter shop, and made an arsenal out of it. In short order, his men were running bullets, and fitting them into such cartridges as they could improvise. They were not much for show, but promised to be capable, in partnership with a carbine, of doing some damage at close quarters.

Major White was feeling much better. Then along came his friend and superior, Colonel Hovey, supporting a strange mass of rags. White sang out:

"Say, Hovey, have you descended to robbing the

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corn-fields of their scarecrows? Where did you steal that bundle?"

Hovey did not smile, even for politeness' sake. He said:

"This man says he escaped from Lexington yesterday, and has come on foot all the way here."

White roared, "He's a liar, for sure, and probably a spy. Lexington is sixty miles away."

Hovey let go of the object, and it fell to the ground in a heap that fluttered. White was for helping it to it's feet with a kick, but Hovey restrained him, and said:

"He can't talk. Give him some whiskey."

Major White flashed a flask, but the man waved it away, muttering:

"I'm temp'rance."

"This is no time for temperance principles," said Major White, forcing the flask between the man's teeth. After a spasm of strangulation, the wretch half rose, and resting on one hand, leaned against White's knee.

"M' name's Josh Wildrick," he said; "I wuz in Lexin'ton whilst it was s'rounded by General Price and the Johnnies. I wuz sick in the horsepital all the time. Typhoid fever. Like to've died. A lady, Miss Lucy Darr, come through Rebel lines one night, nursed us fellers, partickler Colonel Mead, what she's sweet on. When Mulligan s'rendered us — she stayed with us whut was sick. She told me yistiddy as how she heard two Johnnies sayin' they wuz sick of takin' care of prisoners — wuz goin' to bust loose and start Saouth 'fore Fremont gobbled 'em; said they wasn't goin' to leave nary a prisoner alive. Miss Lucy begged me — go fer help some-

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wheres. I sneaked through the lines; been leggin' it ever since, — all day an' all night, runnin' most of the time — wore off my boots, an' my socks, — and most of my feet. See fer yerself. Seemed's if my heart 'd knock a hole clean thoo my ribs. But I thought o' Miss Lucy — I s'pose I've killed myself, but if you'll save her, my life for her'n is a good bargain any day."

"It may be a trap," White whispered to Hovey, then said aloud:

"How did you know we were here?"

"I never knowed it till I stumbled onto ye," said Joshua. "I don't know who ye are now. And I don't caradam' s'long 's you'll only git up and git, and save them pore prisoners." He began to blubber from sheer lack of strength to resist his grief.

Colonel Hovey said, "I'm helpless, White. I've got marching orders in the opposite direction, and the men are saddling up now. I have no discretion. You are too weak to do anything with only a couple of hundred men, and no equipment. It's the fortune of war."

Major White asked Joshua a few questions as to the size of the Lexington garrison. Joshua thought there must be about five hundred holding the town and the prisoners.

"Humph!" said White, "and I've got two hundred and twenty effectives. We'd have the advantage of the surprise, if we could jump their camp before they knew we were coming. If we didn't surprise 'em, they'd eat us up and holler for more. It would be a lark, though. And with that

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girl there — I wonder if she's any relation to old Colonel, or he's now General, Darr?"

"Yes, he's her paw," said Joshua. "I've hearn her speak abaout him."

"Well, I guess I'll drop round that way, and see if I can leave my card," said Major White.

By nine o'clock that night, the two hundred and twenty scouts were under way. Their horses were shod, and the cartridge-boxes held, all told, three thousand new cartridges. The scouts pounded their saddles all night, and by the same token, their saddles pounded them. And the saddles had rather the better of the argument. The scouts got themselves lost time after time, and had cause to fear that it would be broad daylight before they got to the outposts of the Rebel lines.

But there were still a few stars withering in the sky when the first remote sentinel, yawning in chill and dewy loneliness, heard the drumming of hoofs on the road. Before he was fully alive to the meaning of the incursion, he was knocked over by a sabre in Major White's hand.

The line of pickets was driven in and scattered, firing an alarm that was too late. In a few minutes the whole Rebel garrison was convinced that Frémont was on them, with an army of at least twenty thousand. Those that thought on the manner of their going, did not go at all.

Three score and ten of them were constrained to remain as prisoners of their former prisoners.

The first thing Lucy thought, when she was wakened from her sleep by the sound of shots and cries, was that the slaughter was beginning. Now, for the

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first time, she told John of the danger, and said that they would die together.

After a long while of resignation, she grew anxious for something definite to happen. The exaltation began to bore her. A climax deferred maketh the heart sick. She went to the window, and, looking out, saw Union soldiers galloping here and there.

Finally, one cavalier spurred up to her window, and, lifting his hat, introduced himself as Major White, of the Prairie Scouts, very much at her service. He told her briefly of Joshua Wildrick's devotion, and the success that crowned his absolute effort. When Lucy asked how Joshua had stood the exhaustion, Major White answered:

"When I left, the last thing he said was, 'All I want naow is to hear that Miss Lucy is safe, and to spend abaout two month gittin' back the breath I've lost. I don't want them feet of mine to tech the graound fer a coon's age. If I have to walk before two weeks, I'll walk on my hands.'"

The next day the Rebel supply-steamboat, *Sioux City,* docked at Lexington, and seemed greatly surprised to find itself a prisoner in Union hands. Major White loaded on it all the sick and wounded, and one nurse, and sent it to St. Louis. He galloped gaily south, and added his force, largely Irish, to that tempestuous cavalry, "Frémont's Body Guard," led by the Hungarians, Zagonyi and Majthenyi, who revenged the shame of Springfield by a marvellous charge. Save these two, and one Dutchman, the officers were Americans; the men were mostly Kentuckians. They were armed with six-barrelled revolvers, five-barrelled rifles, and sabres. And it was

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said that a hundred and fifty of them charged up a hill, and put ten times their number of Confederates to flight. Their war-cry had a mediæval clang, with its personal watchword, "The Union and Frémont!"

When Lucy and John heard of this new feat of White's Scouts, they were in Darrville, and she was reading it to him from a newspaper as big as a blanket. John's mother was sitting on the edge of the bed, holding one of John's hands in hers, and thinking less of Zagonyi's *élan* than of her son's happiness.

Old Jim Mead, very majestic in a rocking-chair, was listening eagerly, and desperately trying to keep his obtrusive hiccoughs from ruining his dignity. Every time his larynx snapped, he looked reproachfully at the innocent rocking-chair, as if to blame it for the disturbance.

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FIFTH BOOK

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I.

JOHN'S cot in the log cabin began to assume the importance of the canopied and gilded bed where an old-time monarch received his court at *petit lever.*

Brevet-Colonel John Mead was the first returned hero the neighbourhood had had to act as a safety-valve, and the steam pressure of patriotism had risen to the exploding point.

As John said: "Lyin' here with this mass of flowers and bo'quets around me makes me feel as if I was sittin' up at my own funeral. And Lord knows, if I should eat all the fancy dishes they send me, it would be."

A number of delegations came to pay their respects to him, and there was a deal of speechmaking. Most of the speeches were like the prayers offered up by preachers whose real aim is less the glorification of the object addressed than the exploitation of the speaker's own knowledge and eloquence. As certain parsons give their congregations stitches in the neck and lumbago in the back while they tell the Lord all the events and conditions of the past week, so a number of the orators spent their rhetoric on telling John the story of his own past life, a subject on which they might have assumed that he was fairly well informed already.

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There was some drop in the market value of heroics, however, when it became known that John had fallen asleep in the midst of one of these sonorities. He was not always so lucky, and once his mother's cool hand found his forehead fiery after one of these visitations.

After that, Mrs. Mead appointed herself Mistress of the Revels. One speaker, who began his harangue with an allusion to the importation of the first negro into America, and promised to spend at least a week of historical excursus on the subject of slavery, was gently but firmly requested to sit down. A delegation that came all the way from the next county arrived just as John had drifted off on the placid waters of a deep sleep. The chairman, wrathful at losing a chance to unbottle the speech he had brought, insisted that John should be wakened up. There was some argument — but Mrs. Mead finally dispersed the delegates with a broom.

The long, still evenings were medicinal with repose, and John and his mother renewed their acquaintance, returned to their old comradery. She wept at his least recital of some overpast distress, or laughed to her soul's depth at his dry humour. To her love it was almost like having her boy in his cradle again; and his moods had the primeval absoluteness of a babe's inarticulate weal and woe.

That was a red-letter day when John was able to walk from his cot to a chair. One evening, as Mrs. Mead came home in the sunset, she found him leaning on the fence waiting for her. Each with an arm about each, they slowly walked back to the

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cabin. It comforted her that he still leaned rather heavily on her.

Uncle Elkanah Tew had driven up the day after John's arrival. He came in state, with his Rosalind in her best alpaca. He halted in the door, held his wife back by the elbow and chuckled forth at the grinning invalid a little of old Shakespeare's prose, while with much nudging and prompting Rosalind took up her cues as Cressida.

"'That's Hector, that, that, look you, that; there's a fellow! — Go thy way, Hector: — There's a brave man, niece. Oh, brave Hector! Look, now how he looks! there's a countenance. Is't not a brave man?' — a brave man — a brave man? [*Go on, Rosalind.*]"

"'Oh, a brave man!'"

"'Is 'a not? It does a man's heart good — Look you, what hacks are on his helmet! look you yonder, do you see? look you there! There's no jesting: there's laying on; take't off who will, as they say: there be hacks!' ['*Hacks,' that's your cue, Betsy.*]"

"[*Oh, excuse me.*] 'Be those with swords?'"

"'Swords? anything! he cares not; an the devil come to him, it's all one; by God's lid, it does one's heart good. . . . Had I a sister were a grace, or a daughter a goddess, he should take his choice.'"

Mrs. Mead had been wondering if Elkanah were crazy, but John was chortling with delight, and stretched out both lank hands to clasp Elkanah's hands, lean also, but with age not weakness. John introduced Rosalind to his mother, and the two women were soon having a good cheerful cry to-

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gether, while John and Elkanah were indulging in a hand-wringing contest.

Elkanah drove by every few days, and often, when Mrs. Mead was worried at John's restlessness, Elkanah came over and spent the night there, reading to John from Vergil, which neither of them understood, but both got a heavenly music from. With Vergil as lullaby, John would soon sink away to sleep, and Elkanah would spend the rest of the night by a well-shaded lamp, picking out the words one by one in the little lexicon at the back. By morning, he would be able to tell John what it had all been about. In this manner they got that pious fraud, Æneas, into Carthage — and out again.

On nights when Elkanah was too much exhausted to sit up with John, there was never lacking a substitute in the neighbourhood, for this gracious service was always eagerly offered in those early communities. Sickness or distress turned them into fraternities.

One evening, Elkanah led the talk to war, and praised John as a military genius.

"Genius, eh?" John grunted, "humph! funny kind of a genius. I won my first notoriety by a piece of bad management that ought to have got me shot. When I was really fighting as I ought to, I actually was shot. I ran into a trap like a fool mouse in that first battle, and I managed to break out. Next I was taken prisoner when I was wounded, and before I could be exchanged, the enemy walked off and left me to be rescued by a handful of scouts on a picnic. And here I am loafing around the house while my regiment is getting

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another licking down at Belmont under that man Grant. I tell you war is a regular grab-bag. Whether you come out empty-handed, or with a prize, or whether you even get all your fingers back, is largely a matter of luck."

"But, anyway," said Elkanah, "you must know a heap about tactics and stratagems and things like that."

"Lordy," said John, "I don't know half as much as I did before the war. Look here; in the first battle we had, — with Bradford's Raiders, — we came within an inch of getting licked to smithereens because, to tell the truth — because I mussed up the flank attack. Then, at Springfield, we had the finest flank attack you ever heard of up our sleeve. And you know what happened; the main body got the stuffing knocked out of it, and the flankers were scattered all over the county. Why, Uncle Elkanah, my ignorance of war is simply magnificent. And I think most of the others know just about as much as I do. The best general is the man who is the best guesser. A good general ought to win at poker without any trouble. War is a game of blindman's buff, in a dark cellar at midnight, with bandages on the eyes of all the players."

When John had arrived in Darrville, he had found an ominous looking roll of parchment waiting him. It was his commission as colonel. It was dated at a time when he was wounded and jailed in Lexington. He had it framed and hung over his bed, and it was like the sword of the notorious Damocles, warning him that he must not dally too

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long in the lap of convalescence. But his impatience only retarded his recovery.

One morning Elkanah had driven over with a saddled and bridled horse tied to the back of his wagon. He had said:

"John, this here hoss is eatin' us out of house and home. You're strong enough to ride, and not strong enough to walk, and I thought maybe you'd take this critter off my hands till you get well, just as a favour to an old friend."

John gratefully granted the old man's petition.

That afternoon Judge Orme had insisted on having a long confidential talk with him. Lucy had ridden up on her horse and had been engaged in conversation at the gate by Mrs. Mead, till the mysterious visitor came out of the cabin. When he came, his face was in a snarl, and his Good-day was penurious of courtesy.

The two women hastened in to ask John what the trouble was.

"Oh, he wanted me to stay home and run for office. It was only a county clerkship, but he said my military — well, 'glory' was the word he used, would not only slide me in on skates, but would take the rest of the ticket in on my coat-tails. He said I had done more'n my share of fighting, and talked a lot about my duty to my party."

"What an honour! And what did you tell him? That you would stay?" his mother asked, eagerly.

"I simply pointed to my commission, and I said, 'Judge Orme, in my political geometry, there's one axiom, "The whole, that is, the country, is greater than any of the parties."' Finally he went away

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huffy. Mother, it won't be many days now before I'll have to be leaving you again. I hate to go away, and I shall be terribly homesick, but, Mother, — you know yourself what my duty is."

Mrs. Mead put as brave a face on her re-resignation as she could. John saddled his horse and rode away with Lucy. Mrs. Mead waved them a cheery good-bye, and they turned and waved to her till the hill hid them. Then Mrs. Mead, alone, wept out her heart, and faced the old loneliness and dread anew. For she was only a mother, and it was war time.

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II.

THE billowy motion of the cantering horses cheered John and Lucy back into a youth-time gaiety. Now was the day after a sensational melodrama, and all that had excited them was in the memory only an unrealistic parade of stage dangers. The only real things in the world were the sharp, frank November landscape, the benign sky that softened it, the tonic breeze that delighted their nostrils and sang in their ears, the two horses that galloped so sleekly, and with so vivid a rhythm; and, finally, the eyes, the voice, face, figure, of the dearly beloved partner in all this hale experience.

"Lucy," John sang out, "you ride like — like the young bride of a centaur. You are not only the bravest and the best woman in the world — but the most beautiful."

"John," she replied, trying to conceal her delight in his praise, "you've been with those Irishmen so long, I believe you've caught the terrible disease known as blarney."

But when he reached out his hand, she gave it hers, and the horses sidling together galloped like one happy octoped. When they passed a house, or a team, or labourers in the field, they greeted them with hilarious cordiality.

As they passed one little girl, who carried a duck under each arm, and crowded up against the fence,

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and stared at them from the eaves of a sunbonnet, John gave her a low bow, and called out:

"Hail to you, my little Princess."

Later they scared into the weeds a small boy, exuberantly freckled, and driving home a muley cow with a hide like a Turkish rug; Lucy saluted him primly, and called him:

"General!"

Their volatile frivolity gradually expended itself, and when they turned their horses homeward again, their thoughts turned heartward. When they approached the great forest that had been John's childhood demesne, he exclaimed:

"Why, Lucy, there didn't use to be a road into those woods. Let's ride through and see how they look. I could almost shake hands with every tree, and call it by name. Oh, I see. This is a woodcutter's road. They are beginning to massacre these fine old fellows. It's murder, pure and simple. That stump is all that's left of the beautiful tree whose lap sheltered me when I first saw the Virginia Nightingale. Do you remember how that poor little red bird gave me my start in life? Do you remember how you offered to lend me your books, when I was so poor?"

She had forgotten it in the multitude of kind things that had busied her life, but his gratitude gave it back like a mirror. He told the story over to her.

There is a peculiar pathos in hearing of things we have done or dreamed in our earliest years. They say that the child is father to the man, but the man always feels as if the child he once was, is, in sort,

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a dear dead son of his own; and the woman thinks of her earlier self as a little daughter lost beyond recall. So Lucy and John were wonderfully touched as they looked back, through distance, through the haze of years, at the two little tots they once were, so solemn, so earnest, so babyishly in love. And as John told the story over, Lucy gazed through a mist at the western sky, all autumn with sunset, and John must needs pause now and then to smother a catch in his breath that threatened to sound like a sob.

"Lucy, you have always seemed so much like a sort of a guardian angel over me, that I have been half afraid to let myself love you as a — as only a woman. But I have never known the time when little Lucy Darr, or noble Lucy Darr, was not always to me all that a woman should or could be. You are beautiful in face and body and soul, Lucy. You have saved my life, and it belongs to you — not from gratitude alone, but from love; the love of years, the love of the boy, and of the man. Lucy, I love you."

The road had come to an end at a group of trees. Autumn leaves had overflowed the whole forest, like a brown stream. The wind stirring through them crimpled them like ripples, and there was a fascination in the rustle and whisper of the leaves when the horses brushed through them. The horses had stopped now, and were nibbling here and there at sprays and twigs. And John found that Lucy's waist was not an arm's length away. And that his lips could reach hers, if she leaned over a little. As she did. With his cheek he pressed her head back upon his shoulder, and he turned his head to look

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down into the unfathomable deeps of her eyes, and to sip the ineffable sweets of her kiss.

Even the old sun sent through the clouds about him two long level shafts of light, like the uplifted arms of benediction.

There was no wish for further words between the lovers. The sunset warned them to hurry home, and they turned back to the road, and galloped to Lucy's house in a wordless ecstasy. The gloaming was deep enough when they parted there for a farewell kiss, for many a farewell kiss before they could break from the magnet-spell of mutual charm.

As John rode home alone he drank in great breastfuls of air. It was like scented wine, and it buoyed him up like wings. When he slept it was to float on dream pinions through the same Nirvana.

It was only the cynical morning that sent a lean finger of light to point out his commission where it hung on the wall, and to remind him that it was wartime.

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III.

MANY were the walks and talks that John and Lucy had together, after that first perfect understanding. Again the old gate grunted and whined as both of them, well bundled up, but rather sniffly with the chill November evening air, leaned across it to each other. But now there was no bar of misunderstanding and frustration between them, as there had been the last evening they spent together, before he first went to the war.

Old Mrs. Darr did not enjoy the idea of Lucy taking up with the Mead boy, even if he were a colonel of distinction. She could not forget the humbleness of his origin, and she could not easily resign her ambition to form a splendid family alliance with the Wainwright estate.

Besides, Bob Wainwright had graduated from West Point as a second lieutenant of the regular army, and though he was not yet thirty, he was already a brigadier-general of volunteers, one of McClellan's most cherished officers.

But in spite of Mrs. Darr's garrulous fretting, nagging, and protest, Lucy went her own way as serenely as the very moon herself, whom clouds cannot ruffle or retard.

She sent her mother to bed early, and she and John sat together on the horsehair sofa — which began to sag perceptibly in one corner. Their con-

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versation was intensely interesting to each other, though a literal copy of it would hardly make interesting reading. They had a signal by which they knew that it was time for John to be going home: When the lamp, a portly and commodious matronly old lamp, began to gasp and sputter in its death-throes, John knew it was time to say good-night, or, at least, to begin saying it. Their farewell was usually said on the instalment plan.

Lucy filled that lamp in person, for fear the "hired girl" might not put in every drop of oil the bowl would hold.

And poor Bob — or rather, General Robert Wainwright, of the Army of the Potomac — was not there to play his hand in the game of "freeze-out," as of yore.

Days and evenings went by in a pageant of quiet rapture for the two lovers. And all the while John felt himself growing stronger and stronger — felt it almost with regret. Eventually the next to the last day of his leave of absence swung round. It was a busy day for John.

First he must visit the cemetery, and put flowers on the flag-marked mounds that covered the dead bodies that were once schoolboys, and later fellow soldiers with him. He scattered a few flowers, and many a tender memory, many an elegiac regret on the cost of war, and the gaping wounds it makes in the homes and hearts of the people that wage it.

Then he called on old friends, and on a few mothers whom he had last seen waving flags of farewell in wet-eyed bravery to the sons they were lending to the country. And now he found them aged and in

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black, duped by hope, and crushed to find that the sons they had lent had been levied upon, and spent as a tribute.

On these harrowing calls he rode the horse Elkanah had lent him, a stalwart, sixteen hands high, and all black save three white feet; his mane and tail, clouds of smoke. Last of all, John rode up to Elkanah's home, and, scorning to let down the bars, took the gate with a greyhound leap.

Old Elkanah was just coming from the stable-yard, and he fairly whinnied with pleasure at the graceful precision of the feat. Rosalind came from round the corner of the house and joined the old man's delight, and, as usual, without quite understanding its cause.

"'Afternoon, Uncle Elkanah and Aunt Rosalind!" roared John. "I've brought back the clothes-horse you loaned me."

"What ails him?" asked Elkanah, anxiously; "returned him for repairs? Has he got spavin, or botts, or anything? Does he interfere, or suck stumps?"

"No, he's the finest fellow I ever saw. But I leave to-morrow," and John dismounted.

"You be'n't going back to the army so soon?" said Rosalind.

"Yep, I'm sorry to say. So here's your hoss, and I can't begin to thank you for letting me ride him. He has been better'n medicine for me."

"How d'you two git along?" said Elkanah; "you and the hoss?"

"Oh, we're the best of pals, — eh, old man?" said John, looking back and smoothing the horse's nose;

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and the horse answered by laying his head over John's shoulder, and winking his off ear affectionately. Then John said, "Good-bye, old man," and stuck out his fist. The horse reached up his own right hoof, and the two shook hands with the best of comradery.

"Othello will be mighty sorry to lose you," said Elkanah.

"Who's Othello?" asked John.

"Why, the hoss, of course; he's a regular black-amoor. So I called him Othello."

"A good name for a good animal," said John. "He isn't what this here new writer, Artemus Ward, calls an immoral spotted horse."

"Othello was a great fighter, too, you know."

"Yes, I know — thanks to you, Uncle."

"Well, John, my boy" — and Elkanah hesitated — "I got another favour to ask you. I got no place to keep a big horse like Othello. He's too proud and high-steppin' to do much work, and he eats a powerful lot, as I told you before. You'll have to have a horse to carry your Colonelship through the war, and I kind o' thought mebbe you'd just take that nag south with you, and ride him — just as a favour to me and Betsy."

"Uncle Elkanah, you don't mean it?"

"If you don't mind the trouble. Besides, I'd feel terrible set up to think that the great Colonel Mead was prancin' round the field of battle on a colt of my own raising."

"I'm a sort of a colt of your own raising, too," said John, "and you're the best man that ever lived."

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"Then you'll take him along?" said Elkanah, eagerly.

"Will a gosling take a whack at a millpond?"

Time permitted few more words before John must be going. Rosalind, *née* Betsy, gave him a "soldier's comfort," that she had made for him, and a little pocket Bible, with a dedication in her own shaky hand.

"I know that better'n I do Shakespeare," she explained.

Then John planted a good-bye on both of her cheeks, hugged Elkanah hard, and, leaping to the saddle with a new lightness, now that the horse was his own, took the gateway handsomely again, and waved a long adieu as he cantered homeward.

There was a presage of snow in the air, and that night, as John rode to Lucy's for a last evening with her, there was no joy in him.

He had that sneaking, underhanded feeling of shame that one has who carries bad news up his sleeve. He and Lucy, like gamblers with only a few coins left, squandered their last hours together in making love as royally as if they had unlimited time to spend. But the cynical old clock moved on round its white dial. Twice John rose and pushed the hands back; but even at that, time went on.

The faithful old lamp burned its steadfastest, but at last the cruse was dry, and the flame, after a few spasms, collapsed, and a tower of funeral smoke rose from the chimney.

And still John had not said his say. They drew the curtain, and sat in the dim candlelight of the stars. Silence engulfed them as a night, and though

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they were in mutual embrace, their souls seemed to be groping for each other in a cave of gloom. The thought of parting, and the daily risk there was in each moment of absence, added fear to the awe of the loneliness that was awaiting them.

In the depths of this sadness, John felt able to speak. He felt that nothing he could say could make either feel more sorrowful. As he caressed Lucy's hair, he said, with kisses as commas, semicolons, and periods, in plentiful punctuation:

"Lucy Darr, I want you to promise not to misunderstand me intentionally in what I'm going to tell you. I want you to promise not to think even for a moment that it springs from anything but the greatness of my love for you. You know that the highest ambition of my soul is to make you my wife. If I win you, and can keep you close with me to the end of my days, I shall have been successful, even if I never get beyond living in a log cabin. And if I get back from that cursed war safe and sound and all complete, I'm going to make you marry me, whether you've changed your mind by that time or not. But there are certain things called bullets and shells flying round battle-fields like birds of prey, and they occasionally hit people, and they usually leave a man lacking in some particular. Now, I don't carry any charm, because I don't know any that will work. So it is not a bit unlikely that I shall come home with an arm, or a leg, or a couple of eyes, or three or four ears missing. I've already shown that I can be hit by a good marksman. There's a dimple in my cheek that will always say, 'This way went the bullet,' and there's a large spot on my side that

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looks as if it were puckered up with a draw-string, that says, 'A piece of shell ran into me.' Suppose I come home looking like an example in subtraction or long division, you'd want to marry me just the same, and take care of the remnants, if you had to keep 'em in a work-basket. But I don't propose to tie you up to any such unconditional surrender. So, when I go away, Lucy, I leave you as free as I found you; not so heart-free, I hope, but absolutely free from any obligation or betrothal.

"Besides, this war may last till Judgment Day. It began as a 'three months' war;' it's bound to last a year, and it looks as if it would last three or four. It's my first duty to fight till the war's over, or till there ain't enough of me left to bother the enemy. Suppose I'm gone three years, do you suppose I'm going to ask you to wait all that time, and then to wait after that till I can begin all over, and get started in law? Never, never, never! So, sweet Lucy girl, you must understand me, and not argue or complain. I love you with my whole soul, and it is the dream of my days and nights, waking and sleeping, that I may live to win you for my wifie; but it would be unjust to my great love to stoop to any jealous effort to make you a prisoner till I get back. Whenever I go into battle, it will be with your face as my patron saint in a vision. When I get back, I shall hope to come back as a man fit to be your husband, and worthy of earning your love all over again."

It was a long speech, and Lucy took it all in silence. There was the first temptation to complain that in offering her her freedom he protested too

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much, and really sought his own. Lucy let it pass. At the end of John's peroration, she sat in deep musing silence for many minutes. It was an eloquent silence, and thought and devotion and studious unselfishness throbbed through it like a pulse. After a long while, she put her lips to her lover's, and murmured:

"I understand you perfectly, dear old John, and it shall be as you wish. Affianced or free, it can make no difference in my love for you, my prayers for your safety, and for your great splendid success, and my longing, longing, longing to have you back home again."

Still they sat together under the starry shower. And when midnight boomed from the old clock — an unspeakably late hour in the country — old Mrs. Darr appeared in the hall above with a lamp, and called as gently as she could — for she heard the sobbing of the girl, and the deep, consoling voice of the man.

"Lucy, my child, it's terrible late; better come up-stairs."

It was to Lucy as a profanation, a rude intrusion on a sacrament. But John, knowing that lovers' last good-byes are none the easier for repetition, hushed the protest Lucy was about to give voice to, and called out:

"I'm leaving in just a minute, Mrs. Darr. I'll bid you good-night and good-bye."

The old woman wished him luck in his warfaring, and departed, taking with her the inquisitive lamp-light, and giving them back to the stars that have watched so many partings, and have learned to

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be merely stoic lookers-on, without comment or emotion. If the stars had not learned indifference, they would long ago have wept themselves away.

At last John managed to say the last farewell, and to cease the kissing of the tear-embittered sweets of Lucy's cheek. He found his horse in the stable, mounted him, and paused at the edge of the piazza to give another last kiss, and to repeat the alternate farewell. He begged Lucy to hurry in out of the frosty air, but as long as he could see the Darr homestead, in the shadows he could see, or thought he could see, the fluttering handkerchief of the girl he left behind.

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IV.

THE next day John rode over to the train. He was in his uniform, with the new insignia of the colonelcy. He rode Othello, and on the glossy flank banged and clattered a gleaming sabre. It was new, and had John's name etched on the blade of it, and in small letters, for his eye only, the words "from Lucy."

Before John left his own home that morning, his family made him strut up and down in front of them in his new regimentals. He felt very silly and childish, and yet a little foppishly proud of it all. His father was most deferential, and his brothers were so impressed that they determined to enlist secretly — they dared not face their mother's tears.

And Mrs. Mead went prancing up and down, coquetting, pirouetting, and minuetting with her magnificent son. John could see that her hilarity was all a ruse to crush back the tears, and he hastened to go before another tragedy of woman's weeping should sap his resolution, and make him resign his commission. He had stood all the farewells he could bear.

When he stepped out to mount Othello, whom one of his brothers had brought, and whose stirrup the other brother held, he found that heavy snowflakes were hovering and swooping along the air.

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Many a kiss he gave his mother, and many kisses he flung her like snowflakes from his lips; and his hand ached from the grip he had given his father's hand and the stout fists of his brothers.

In spite of the snow, he found at the station a gathering of the leading citizens. Among others, Jake Strother was there, still ashamed to stay at home, and more ashamed to go to war and leave his wife to charity.

Old Doctor Gibbs, the apothecary who had bought the Virginia Nightingale, was mightily gratified when, in the presence of all, John credited him with giving him the first money he ever earned, and making his education possible. John forbore to mention that Doctor Gibbs had tried to give him a little bad money, and the old druggist had long forgotten that particular case; besides, he was saying in a shaky voice:

"Colonel Mead, seein' you makes me sorry I hain't got a second son to send to the war. I had a boy — you knew him — growed up with him — he was my only boy, and he ketched the fever in camp, and died 'thout ever seein' the enemy. And m' wife and me's so old we'll never have another son. If we could have, God knows my country could have him — and me, too, if I wasn't wore out and useless."

There were other words of heroic resolution from those who were bankrupt of hope and joy, but rich in patriotism, and John was trembling with the exultation of passion for that strange spirit we call our country, when Peter Platt, who, to John, was always the Informer, the telltale of his boyhood,

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poured vinegar into the sacrificial wine, with a sneer:

"Well, I've served my three months of enlistment, and I've got out. I was half clothed, half paid, and half starved. The officers don't half of 'em know their business, but the contractors know theirs, and they'll keep the war goin' as long as the people will stand it. We can never lick the South, especially with the people in power that we elected. I'm goin' to stay home, and work to down the administration. Abe Lincoln is a good-for-nothin', low-browed country gawk, and the country is goin' to the dogs."

Those were times when the people, who were risking their lives for a vague sentiment that was as lofty and as impalpable as the upper air, were a bit impatient of criticisms, however well found, from the stayers-at-home or the roosters-on-the-fence.

Before John quite knew what he was doing, or why, he had Peter Platt up against the wall of the station, and was shaking him like a rat. Then he said:

"Peter Platt, the last act of yours I remember was your raising a white flag at the beginning of a battle. I knocked you over the head with the butt of a gun, and you did no mischief. The army is better off without you, but you can do more harm to the Union at home than you ever did in the ranks. If you're planning to go round talking your treachery and your dough-face, weak-knee policy of let-the-Union-go-to-hell, I just want these good

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people to remember your attitude during our final argument."

So saying, with a quick wrench he flung Peter Platt across his knee, and spanked vigorously and enthusiastically that portion of Mr. Platt's anatomy which a thoughtful Providence has specially provided for spanking.

After that, when Peter Platt criticised the government, the polite turned away to hide their smiles; the rest laughed in his face.

John dusted off his hands contemptuously when he had applied his *argumentum ad hominem,* saw Othello safely bestowed in a box car, and stood on the back platform of the last coach till the cheers of his townsfolk faded to a shrill, childish hallooing, and then was quenched in the clickety-click of the wheels on the rails.

He watched the old landmarks, — homesteads, forests, farms, roads, all familiar nooks and crannies, where memories lingered like moss in cliff-rocks; and they all slid back into the distance, and grew Liliputian, till they were swept as with a broom over the horizon. Gradually the homesteads, forests, and farms and roads took on a new and strange look. John wondered if he would ever return again out of the turmoil and current of new regions and experiences into the quiet backwater stillness of the old, dear places, the dear old faces.

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V.

THIS book pretends only to give the intimate story of John Mead and the important events of his inner, his real, life, — especially the things omitted from his regular biographies. If you have read any of these excellently written accounts of his public, and, therefore, extraneous and immaterial, career, you need not be told in detail; and if you have not read them, you are advised to, for you will not be here told in detail, of the larger feats of John's military activity. But just to touch the mile-stones as we pass them, to make sure that we are progressing, let us tell off on our fingers the biggest events of this period of his life.

John was assigned to a regiment under General Pope, who was distinguishing himself by clearing the State of Missouri of Rebel bands. Like the old sexton in the song, he "gathered them in, yes, gathered them in." In one or two of these round-ups, John's regiment took a lively share. Then there followed a mud-march, in which, as a newspaper writer wrote, "the men waded in mud, ate in it, slept in it."

By this march Pope reached New Madrid, on the Mississippi, and found it strongly held. After a noisy artillery wrangle, the Confederates evacuated

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it, and ensconced themselves in the beautifully fortified mud-shelf, known to fame as Island Number Ten. It was as if a turtle, whose beak and claws had given trouble enough, had retired into an impregnable shell. If Pope could get across the river and attack the island in the rear, he might take it, but there were batteries on the other shore to check just such a game.

Up above the island was Commodore Foote with his Union fleet, which, by its share in the capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, had taken part in giving U. S. Grant fame and the country hope.

If Foote and Pope could collaborate, they could bake that turtle out of its shell; but Foote could not get down past the turtle, or, at least, he would not risk his fleet and his transports in a gauntlet dash past those loud-mouthed Rebel cannon.

He pumped shell into the fort with great vigour, but the Confederate Beauregard only telegraphed to his President, Jefferson Davis, that Foote had thrown three thousand shells and burned fifty tons of powder, with no other result than the death of one Rebel. The game looked like a stupid case of stalemate, when John Mead's homely genius came to the front. He had that rarest of gifts, the power of seeing what is right underneath the eyes. Few people ever observe their own eyelashes.

"General Pope," said John one day, "why don't you cut a canal across the neck of land there, and let Foote's gunboats come through that?"

"Why, man, how can you cut a canal there? It's all swamp-land, overgrown with trees, and flooded with water."

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"Well, then, general, let's cut a canal through the trees."

It was a fantastic idea that never occurred to any one else, chiefly because canals are always ditches cut through land to let water in. But here the land was under water already; *ergo* there could be no canal. John took his regiment and four light steamboats and a few barges, and set to work. It was like his old familiar task of making a clearing in a forest; only, most of these trees had to be sawed off four feet under water, and dead trees must be hauled away by steamboats instead of ox-teams.

Nineteen days his men worked like beavers and muskrats, and then a twelve-mile canal was finished; Foote's transports came through; the gunboats ran the gauntlet after all. The Confederates made a wild scramble to get away, but they were corralled with ridiculous ease: one gunboat, six steamers, one hundred and twenty-three cannon, three generals, two hundred and seventy-three officers, and seven thousand men, with a musket apiece. Pope lost not one man in this great quarry, and a prettier proof of the value of strategy could not be seen, for on the very same day came the news of the battle of Shiloh. That battle will remain as one of the red riddles of history; the best that can be said is that, though surprised, defeated, and almost driven into the Tennessee River on the first day, the Union troops, when reinforced, regained the next day the camps they had been driven out of, and drove the Confederates off the field. But the North lost thirteen thousand men, and the South seven thousand. Lucy's father was in the fiercest of that

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man, and his veins were filled with blood that seemed to have rippled out of the very scarlet of the stripes, and his ambition was set with the stars from the blue field itself. What men in what stronghold could have stopped them then? Not the Confederates, who, brave and earnest as any men that ever fought, seemed to feel that the high flag was a great talisman, a brazen serpent, dispelling the evil spirits of disunion and rebellion. And they fled, shamed and routed.

This great triplex victory, won by three generals under one, secured for Grant, the chief commander of it all, a chance to leave the West and go east to see if his feet could fit, and his legs wield, the seven-league boots wherein McClellan, Pope, Burnside, Hooker, and George Meade had stumbled and tottered, and whence they had fallen over backward before the wizardry and dash of Robert E. Lee, best of American strategists, but on the wrong side, and, luckily, with resources too few to make him more than a magnificent postponer of inevitable defeat.

Grant went east to take the specially revived office of lieutenant-general. Lincoln (the Illinois rail-splitter) liked his way of doing things, and getting them done. He called the Illinois tanner to the Capitol to give him his commission personally, and a personal promise of all support. As they stood there, two plebeians of lowliest origin, holding in their grip the destinies of a great political experiment, a great evolutional hope, perhaps the noblest and the hopefullest thing about the whole scene was the businesslike directness, the homely earnestness,

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the absolute absence of ceremonial, bauble, ermine, hand-kissing, and condescension. On such occasions, democracy is at its best, and man at his highest.

In contrast with the white light of such a scene, there is a sickish nursery glare upon the tinsel, the pretence, the precedence, the paint and powder and perukery, and all the impudent shams and outrageous presumptions of Old World state.

Grant was to go from there to many a bloody rebuff, but he always strove, not to outpoint a rival chess-player, but to exhaust, and follow up, and beat to the dust a dangerous enemy of his country. So he went puffing and chewing his cigar, and trying every movement but the two favourite resorts of his predecessors — masterly inaction and artistic retreat.

While he plunged into the wilderness north of Richmond, he gave the rest of the Confederacy to his old crony, Sherman, the man who had advised him not to leave the army when Halleck kept him smarting under implied arrest and disgrace.

And by this time the little three months' war, that had begun in April, 1861, had drifted on its crimson path to April, 1864. From being a partisan quarrel that ended in blows, it had attained the dignity of a titanic struggle between the centrifugal and the centripetal forces of a vast republic. And then, New Year's Day, 1863, after serving faithfully as the obedient minister of the people that chose him, Lincoln had made the warfare epic, and the Northern cause divine, by welding to it and

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melting in with it the cause of freedom, entire and final. He proclaimed the Emancipation.

When Lincoln took this step at last, he alienated a portion of his followers, who had not seen how thoroughly slavery and secession were Siamese-twinned together. But he won over the larger-hearted lovers of humanity and citizens of the world, and even across-seas in Manchester, where the British workmen were out of work and facing starvation, because the North held the cotton-ports of the South blockaded — even from those bitter hearts was wrung a message of sympathy for the North in its new cause. From then on, the European aid and hope for the success of the Southern disruption, fell into dry-rot.

To John Mead, the new phase of the war made it a holy crusade. Before, it had been a stern resistance to the forces seeking to split the Union apart, a righteous check put on the encroachments of the slaveholders. Now it was an assault at the very heart of the great curse of slavery, it was a resolve to carry light into a dark place, to clear out a noisome, pestilential, stagnant pool from a broad and sunlit prairie. It was a chance to end the odious inconsistency of slavery with the very first line of the Declaration of Independence. John felt himself no longer merely a Federal soldier. He was a Crusader for the rights of man, with the accolade of the future upon his shoulder, a vision of beckoning Freedom, all golden in the clouds above him, and under his feet broken slave-whips, like bruised serpents, and about him music of shattered manacles.

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This new theme of his life justified him in his own eyes, and sustained him through the ruthlessness of Sherman's march to Atlanta, with the endless brutalities and injustices, and the nagging horrors of invasion in the heart of a country. The old Crusaders, on their way to Palestine, committed atrocities far beyond the scope of the Moslem, whom they so abhorred, and who met abhorrence with equal contempt and less hypocrisy; but the Crusaders felt shrived and absolved of all the evil things they did, because they believed that an imaginary good might come of them; death was a sure admittance to a paradise where no Paynims need apply.

So Sherman's men carried with a certain jaunty self-respect and self-forgiveness the pillage of their progress. The rough work of the advance-guard, and of reconnoissance in force, did not please John, but he did it under orders, though he winced when he thought how he would feel if his own mother or Lucy had been in the place of the Southern women, who wrung their helpless hands as the invaders rifled their homes and barns, drove off their stock, and left behind nothing but poverty weeping amid wreckage.

For nearly three years John had not seen Lucy; letters were infrequent and obsolete; doubly so since she had been unable to endure life in the stagnation of Darrville, and had volunteered as a nurse, to be sent hither and yon.

Lucy's heart and mind were softened and educated by the daily task of relieving human anguishes, writing letters to the families and the loves of the helpless, and reading the answers that came; consol-

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ing broken-hearted and broken-bodied men; helping young soldiers to give up all earthly hope and to march bravely into the midnight of their graves. All this made her soul bigger and yet finer, and enriched her womanliness infinitely.

But John — he was living in a rain-soaked uniform, in muddy and rusty-spurred boots, riding a weather-beaten and ill-groomed horse, along lines of unkempt and slovenly soldiers. He was eating and sleeping where and when the chance came, if it came at all. The women he saw fled from him, or heaped upon him contempt spoken or merely blazed from Southern eyes.

He felt so the need of a woman's sympathy, of a woman's conversation, of a woman's mere presence, that he prolonged his interviews with the indignant Southern beauties or matrons, apologised humbly for his hard necessities, and tried to soothe them by his chivalry. That he was not successful was hardly surprising. The angel Raphael could hardly have won the smiles of a people whom he had plainly come to deprive of all their earthly comforts, all that made life life.

So John grew helplessly harder and rougher. He was drifting dangerously near cynicism and misanthropy — even to the final evil of misogyny. And then he met Alabama June Muir!

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VI.

THREE years is a long time. Especially if you are in jail, or in love with an absent one — *die ferne Geliebte.* To a moth three years is life, death, purgatory, and paradise, — or eternal candle-flames if he has been a profligate insect.

Three years is at least an epoch in any love-affair.

Soldiers live such hard lives when wars are long and busy, that the rare, the soft note of womanly beauty sounds louder in their ears than the harsh and daily bugle, as the little twitters of rain-drops catch the sense in the midst of the most boisterous thunder volley.

John Mead was a man. He had nothing of the saint in him, except enthusiasm and resolution. His love for Lucy had softened his heart to womanly influence. He had a great need, a devouring hunger, for the companionship, the contrast, the complementary nature of a woman at his side.

After three years out of sight of his mother, out of sight of Lucy, out of sight of any of the girls he had known, of the girls whose smiles he had commanded and revelled in — after three years of outlawry in the Eve-less wilderness, he was fair game for almost any pretty face, almost any twink-

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ling eye, almost any lips that seemed to flaunt the rosy signal, "Come and kiss me!"

Warfare had ceased to be warfare; it was become a daily job for monthly wages. Excitement was part of the stupid business; the risk of life was the routine; going to battle was merely opening shop; the lonely bugle sighing out "taps" to the stars was only the clock for putting up the shutters; a shell that struck at the feet and did not explode, a bullet that killed the next man, or took a button off his own coat — he put it down to profit and loss.

The movement against Atlanta — not the heart, but the stomach, or, at least, the liver of the Confederacy — was beginning to bore him to death. The Rebel general, Joseph E. Johnston, retreating and retreating, grimly and dangerously, but steadily, was a tiresome man to fight. The problem of paying out the line of communications behind, like a lengthening wake that must be cautiously watched, was an unheroic piece of ciphering. Then the suburbs of Atlanta were reached, and the Confederate president, Davis, supplanted the cautious Johnson with the impetuous Hood, who began to attempt the offensive, and struck hard blows that sprained his own muscles more than they hurt his enemy, though he killed MacPherson, a Union major-general of thirty-four years. But at length, before Hood knew it, he was hoodwinked, fairly sidestepped, and elbowed and bunted — the technical word is "flanked" — out of Atlanta.

At two o'clock the morning of September 2, 1864, Colonel Mead was wakened by a dull roar, as of thunder muffled with distance. He looked out of

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his tent. In the sky the grand army of the stars was passing in glittering parade.

John called softly to a sentinel posted before his tent, and asked what the noise was. Thunder?

"The Johnnies must be blowing up their magazines," the sentinel guessed.

"That's just it; they're getting ready to evacuate Atlanta!" John exclaimed. And he flung on his clothes and hastened to General Slocum's tent. A council of war was soon gathered there, and the order to advance was issued. Daylight found Slocum's corps marching. The scouts and advance-guard met no resistance. The troops pushed on, jubilantly, forgetting to growl at the ungodly hour of their summons. At nine o'clock the mayor of the city came out to meet Slocum, and formally surrendered such of the town as remained after the bombardment and Hood's farewell destruction, and such of the townspeople as remained after the panic and flight of the night before.

John was with the reconnoitring column that went prying with much sidelong suspicion into the city. Wavering towers of smoke marked the gaping wounds of Hood's last desperate measure, and few of the houses lacked the bruises and scars of the bombardment. But there was still a cosy beauty in the town, with its homelike houses settled comfortably back in their luxuriant gardens and lawns. And the trees that leaned together and fanned their leafy branches lazily seemed less to form a triumphal arch than a bower of rest and solace.

The flag was raised on the court-house with all the ceremony of a prodigal returned, but there was

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an absence of hospitality that was oppressive. The spirit of the prodigal's elder brother seemed to prevail. John dismounted, gave his horse to an orderly, and took a little stroll, laying off his military responsibilities with such a sense of relief as his men felt when they lifted their heavy knapsacks from their galled shoulders.

The citizens John passed as he walked glared at him with eyes full of hardly tempered hate. The citizenesses, whom curiosity had brought out, took advantage of the protection of their petticoats to flaunt their scorn. They hissed at the Union men, held back their skirts from them as from some pollution, and exchanged with one another comments of the most unbridled contempt.

After several such experiences, John ceased to enjoy the beauty and grace of the fairer Rebels. His delight in the charm of their faces withered before the answering expression of intense disrespect. Thereafter, as he passed a group of women, he lowered his eyes, or kept them on his cigar.

That cigar was a thing of villainous perfume. It was distinctly an open-air cigar, such as is endurable only to the one who smokes it, and to him only because it is his last resort. John began to feel uncomfortable, too, about his personal appearance. He knew he was not a thing of beauty to begin with. He knew he had dressed hastily and in the dark, and his striker had not shaved him. His chin felt to his hand like a currycomb.

And then, when he had reached the very dregs of his triumphal entry, and was grimacing over the bitter lees at the bottom of his cup of wassail;

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then, when he was feeling as disreputable and unkempt as any vandal, and as disgruntled as any despised vagabond, he heard that unmistakable Voice, that Voice all atwinkle with laughter, that Voice all atune with tremulous magnetism:

"Bless mah soul, if heah isn't Misteh Mead! Why, good mawnin'."

He looked up, and his eyes opened as the eyes of a martyr before an angelic vision. His ear had told him who it was; but his eye was still only half ready for the radiance, the rainbow radiance, of Alabama June Muir.

And she — the arch-Rebel, the traitress in enchantress form, the witch of delight, is bending upon him her smiling gaze, is offering to him the hand that rests once more in his like a palm-ful of petals.

Again John feels himself, not so much laughing, as being laughed at. He is having a delicious chill and fever of amused delight, and he doesn't know the cause of his amusement; he only knows that he likes it.

So they stood, he laughing into her sunlit face, she smiling into his smile with her serene eyes, till the girl who accompanied Alabama, and had stood as unnoticed as she was amazed, caught Alabama's hand, and said, indignantly and vehemently:

"Alabama Muir, Ah'm surprised at you! Standing heah talking to a Yankee in broad daylight. Come along, or yo' aunt will disown you."

And the seraph was dragged away from John's heaven; the hand he still clung to so fondly gently slipped from his lonesome fingers. But not before Alabama had said:

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"My fatheh is up in Virginia, fighting Grant; he thought it was too dangerous fo' me up there, so he sent me down heah, where he thought Ah'd be puffectly safe. And heah Ah am a prisoneh the fust thing. Ah'm living with mah aunt, Mrs. Peyton, on Peach-tree Street. Come round this evenin', Misteh Mead, if yo' have nothing betteh to do."

As if there could be anything better to do! John watched Alabama till she vanished in the throng, as an angel stealing into a drift of clouds. When she was gone he stood moveless, musing upon her unutterable charm. The very place she had paused upon seemed still to be alive with spices. Her glance seemed still to laugh through the sunbeams, to linger upon them like a golden echo of visible music.

He put his hand with his usual gesture to his chin. It felt like a stack of bayonets. He rushed to the nearest barber-shop. He fully expected the negro there to cut his throat; but at least he would die happy. He knew there was little work to do for the present, but to be prepared against surprise — a most improbable possibility — and to wait for General Sherman and the main body to come up, in response to Slocum's joyful despatches, which were already thrilling the whole North into hosannas.

But John kept saying over and over the address Alabama gave him, like a boy on a serious errand. And he wondered how he could live till evening to see her again.

The barber's razor was dancing a clog on the strap, and the darkey was gabbling away unheeded till John heard the words "at fo' o'clock this evenin'." He was startled. He echoed: "Four

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o'clock this evening — do you mean four o'clock this afternoon?"

"Oh, yassa', aft'noon an' evenin's all de same down hyah. Evenin' begins long abo't three o'clock in th' aft'noon. Yassa', dat's de way we reckin it — abo't three — yassa', abo't three o'clock. Oh, yassa' — evenin' begins long abo't three — yassa', yassa'," — etc.

That negro has never since been able to understand why the mere statement of a bit of Southern chronology should give such rapturous joy to a human being from the North.

John bought out the whole stock in trade of the barber-shop: a shave, a hair-cut, a shampoo, a coat of polish for his astonished boots, and a thorough brushing of his clothes and hat — some of the dust on that hat had been there since Chattanooga. It was an historic cloud of dust, but John only sneezed at it.

He went to his quarters, and called for his lieutenant-colonel, who did not recognise him at first. John, with as much solemnity as he could command, — which wasn't much, — turned over the regiment to the lieutenant-colonel.

As John knocked at the door of the Peyton house, the clock in the hall thumped three. A negro butler opened the door, and gazed in horrified amazement at John's uniform; then he said:

"Reckon yo' has come to de wrong ho'se, Gen'ral."

"Why, Dan, you old rascal, what you doing down here?"

"Gor bress me, ef et ain't Misteh — I mean Gin-

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'ral Mead. Well, well, well, Ah sut'nly am proud to see you agin — an' lookin' so gorgeositous. Yo' — well, well, well, Misteh Gin'ral — Marse Mead. Does yo' remembeh dem prophecies yo' was a prophesyin' up No'th thar that time, when yo' tol' ol' Marse Muir that some day us niggehs wus gwine be sot free? Wall, et sut'nly do look as if yo' was a reg'lah Elijer. But ablution or no ablution, I done stick to mah young missis, Miss Alabama — Lor' bress mah soul, Misteh Mead, Ah'd ratheh be her orn'ry ol' slave, dan Pres'dent Linkum hisse'f."

Before John knew quite what he was saying, he had answered, "So would I! Uncle Dan — er, er — tell your mistress that I am here."

Meanwhile he had been ushered into the drawing-room, and Dan went bustling up the steps. He returned to announce that his mistress would be down at once.

"At once" seemed a little eternity to John, before Alabama's tuneful feet made a xylophone of the stairs.

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VII.

WHEN he heard the tinkle-tankle of Alabama's slippers on the steps, John braced himself for a shock. He got it. She came through the door as a young slim white crescent moon dances smiling and sudden from behind a church roof.

It was easy to see why John should beam upon Alabama. Had she been an inanimate statue in marble, carved by Praxiteles, and tinted by some skilful painter, there would have been reason enough for John to delight in her. But she was no statue, and her colour changed like a western sky's. And she was the most living of all living beings, alive in every inch of her, alaugh with sheer bliss of life in every pore.

The problem was, why did she beam on John? Here he was, unhandsome, ungraceful, ungainly, un-everything-prepossessing. And he was, to boot, an Abolitionist, a "black Republican," a foreigner and an invader. But still she liked him, enjoyed him, forgave him everything that he was and wasn't, but shouldn't or should have been. And she had spent several hours with her horrified aunt just to break the news that John was coming to call, and to cajole and tease and decoy the old lady into first

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enduring the presence of a Yankee, and next into promising to treat him as a civilised being, a gentleman, and a guest.

Why, oh, why all this interest? She was not infatuated with John; she did not love him in any way; she never dreamed of a dream of marrying him. Then why all this devotion?

Simply this: the people we like are at times more entertaining than the people we love; and she liked John; liked him tremendously. He entertained her; she enjoyed his careless talk; his most trifling thought seemed momentous; she looked forward to and back to her meetings with him as pleasant whiles not wasted. Then his eyes were eloquent with compliment, and frank with confessing the enchantment she exercised over him.

These two could go on being beatific mutual friends for a lifetime, provided always that they skated fast, and did not linger where the ice was thin. But there was the danger. Skates will go askew at just the wrong moment.

When to-day Alabama floated into the room, John bowed very low, and shook hands very warmly. Then he looked too long, and bent toward her with outstretched arms. There was a sound as of cracking ice.

But it was only the step of Mrs. Annabel Peyton on the stairs. She glided in with the graciousness of a white-haired duchess, born to the purple. There was in her manner a subtle blend of welcome to the guest under her roof, and of aloofness to the interloper. After a little labour in overcoming the static friction of a conversation newly begun, the talk

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drifted to apologies for the condition of the house, and the oddity of the women's apparel.

Mrs. Peyton was saying:

"Ah feah yo' No'thehn gentlemen will be disappointed in the conquest yo'-all have made. The So'th has fought so long and so hahd that it is in the depths of poverty. We cain't expoht, and we cain't impoht, and there are no men to run the factories, so we ladies have to do abo't everything except fight. This frock I have on, and the one Alabama weahs, we both spun with ouah own hands, and dyed with dyes we made ourselves."

"Yes," chuckled Alabama, "and look at those buttons: they are peach-stones. Some of those that Auntie is wearing were made out of pe'simmon and gourd seeds, which we poked holes through. That hat Ah wo' this mawning Ah crocheted myself, and the ahtificial flowehs on it were made out of goose-feathehs. This beautiful bracelet Ah have on is, as you see, made out of Confederate soldiehs' buttons. Yo' have heard of ouah soldiehs, Ah presume," she quizzed, and John answered:

"Yes, I carry around a few souvenirs of my meetings with them — this cunning dimple in my cheek is one of them."

Mrs. Peyton broke in sadly:

"Yo' must excuse ouah shabbiness, Kyunnel Mead. We were not always so po'. But we cannot eat the family heirlooms; diamonds and pearls are indigestible. We found they wouldn't take the place of what we used to eat, even if salt is seventy cents a pound, and sugar two dollahs; butteh ten dollahs a pound, and flouah fifty dollahs a barrel."

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"Ah had a letteh," interrupted Alabama, "from my fatheh, in which he said that up in Richmond flouah was sometimes three hundred dollahs a barrel."

"Still," said Mrs. Peyton, with doleful cheer, "we are luckieh than some. The lady next do' had twelve sons enlisted in our army, and she learned yesterday morning that the ninth of them had been killed, and she hasn't a penny left in the world. She wears a hat made out of old clothes, stuck together with pine-needles — a spool of cotton costs five dollahs now."

Alabama, always uneasy when the conversation became serious, interpolated, "Two weeks ago Ah went to mahket with a basketful of Confederate money, and what I got for it didn't fill the pocket in mah jacket."

John saw the high-spirited pluck of these women, and admired it as much as their ability to receive into their house and into their exquisite hospitality, himself, as one of the soldiers of the cause that had brought their pride to these straits. He wondered if there were any hope of breaking the Toledo steel that could bend so far, and keep its keenness and brilliance.

Mrs. Peyton answered his riddle without knowing it: "Oh, Kyunnel Mead, there's no use of ouah denyin' that yo'-all have defeated us. It's only a question of time till the last proud spirit is crushed, and the last stiff neck is bowed. The old days of the So'th are oveh. The gentlemen are all bankrupted; the plantations won't be able to pay the interest on the debts, or to pay the wages of the

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slaves yo'-all have set free. A new class will rule the So'th, a mob of adventurehs, of black bullies, and of po' white trash. The best families, that have reared gentlemen of culture and leisure, and of refinement, will have to stahve, or descend to trade or manual labouh, and every kind of degradation. The old So'th is ruined, Kyunnel Mead, and yo'-all have killed it. Happy are the soldiers, young and old, that have died in battle, and not lived to see the future of the So'th."

There was a silence of heavy length, then John, in a new mood, answered very gently:

"Mrs. Peyton, it is only the dead in their graves that I really feel sorry for. Of course, the wreckage and destruction are awful. I am horrified when I think how much of it I have had to take part in. I don't for a moment resent the hatred the Southerner feels for the Northerner who has caused it. But I tell you, Mrs. Peyton, total it all up as you may, the price the South is paying is very cheap for what it is getting."

"And what can that be, in heaven's name?" gasped Mrs. Peyton.

"Mrs. Peyton, I feel sorry for every one of the thousands on crutches or with empty sleeves; I could almost weep at the sight. But I always stop and say to myself: 'That arm or that leg that is gone was all gangrened, or they wouldn't have amputated it. And the reason they amputated it was to save the man's life. And by amputating it they did save the man's life. And if they hadn't amputated it, he wouldn't be going about in the sunlight, and the society of the people he loves and

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likes, but would be lying dead and cold and useless in his grave.' "

"All that is neitheh ve'y pretty nor ve'y apropos, so fah as Ah can see, Kyunnel Mead," said Alabama, with brows quaintly knit.

"Oh, yes, it is," said John, leaning forward earnestly, "for the South, your beautiful, proud, and high-spirited South, had its right arm bruised and festering with a terrible gangrene."

"Slavery, Ah suppose yo' mean?"

"Yes, and not only slavery, but, more fatal yet, a horrible idea that idleness, or a profession, or the management of a large estate, is the only thing becoming a gentleman. It may be true of one of Society's gentlemen, but I tell you, Nature's gentleman, and God's gentleman, and the Wide World's gentleman, and the gentleman of progress and of achievement, is the man that is willing to work, and wants to work, and does work; the man that is ashamed to have any one work harder than he does, is ashamed to be idle, ashamed to let any one else lift a heavier weight, or turn out a better job than he himself can; ashamed to let anybody else do his work for him, unless at the same time he is doing something else still more important, and is paying the other fellow a proper wage and a proper respect."

"Yo' believe, then, that all men, niggehs as well as whites, are created free and equal, do yo'?" asked Mrs. Peyton.

"Oh, I can see that some men are heavier than others; that I'm taller than this man, and shorter than t'other; that one fellow is a slave to bad habits or inheritances, and that another seems to be master

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of his own luck — but as far as the writers of those words meant them to carry, I believe that all men were created free and equal, as I believe nothing else in this world."

"Well, Ah don't agree with yo', Kyunnel Mead," said Mrs. Peyton, resolutely.

"I know you don't," said John, "and none of you Southerners do, or ever would have believed it, if this war hadn't come. But, after the country settles down again, and the Southerners really employ their natural gifts in producing something for themselves, when they cease relying on ignorant, and lazy, and unwilling slaves to do everything badly, that a free and independent man can do a million times as well himself, then the South will see the value of this amputation, and it will get along better with three healthy limbs than it ever did with four, one of which was poisoning the whole body. This war has cost a hideous price, but we'll all live to see the time when the South will say, 'We thank Thee, O God, that in Thy wisdom Thou didst not grant us our prayer.' We'll all see the time when Confederate veterans will look round on the New South and the True South, and say, 'I'm glad the Yankees licked us. We needed it. It did us good. It saved our lives and our sons' lives.'"

Mrs. Peyton and Alabama were speechless with amazement and indignation at the audacity and length of John's harangue, and they were stammering for words in reply, when a rainbow of peace loomed in upon the lowering storm.

Dan appeared at the door, carrying a great tray burdened with a finer luxury than boar's head, pea-

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cock on silver charger, or punch flaming in a bowl, or plum pudding asteam with its own incense.

It was as if Dan had plucked from its orbit a great green planet, an oblate spheroid like our own, only not quite so large. And it was as if that planet had been nicely split at its equator, disclosing a core of molten scarlet stuff, the last and best of the four elements, which are earth, air, fire, and watermelon.

This heroic watermelon was one of the last roses of summer. Another day, and it would have passed its deliberately reached prime. To-day it had the cool-warm glow of an aurora borealis, its lush luxurious lusciousness hinted of a pulp of edible roses, dipped in, and dripping still with, sherry. And the black seed studded the mountainous delicacy like spices and cloves. And in the presence of its beauty, small things like Wars, and Bankruptcies, and Emancipations, and Racial Destinies, fell back to their proper insignificance.

"Dis heah wortermillium is the ve'y latest of the season!" and something like a tear glistened in Dan's eye. "It couldn't wait one nother minute, Miss Annabel; it is so ripe it is just splunching fer somebody to eat him quick," and he turned his head away from the melon, to avoid going mad with desire. "Wheah would yo'-all like to eat it; on the front po'ch, as usual?"

Mrs. Peyton and Miss Muir looked at each other. Their eyes exchanged a communication to the effect that being seen by the neighbours breaking watermelon with a Yankee was out of the bounds of the advisable.

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"It is mo' shady and comfortable on the reah piazza," said Mrs. Peyton.

From the back porch Alabama pointed out to John the inner line of fortifications of the city. As John munched the circular slab of red that Dan had carved and placed before him, he could only murmur with the despairing sigh of a blissful wretch who has nothing left to wish for:

"Well, all I can say is, I'm glad I'm on this side of those fortifications, and that General Hood was so kind as to let us in without further trouble."

"That's so," said Alabama. "A day later, and this last melon of the season would have spoiled."

Mrs. Peyton was astounded at the sacrilegious lightness of the youngsters, but John was musing aloud:

"If the Czar of all the Russias were to offer his crown and half his wealth to his chief cook and bottle-washer, and say, "Here, you, Uncle Danski, get me up a finer thing to eat than anything ever known!' — what could the poor fellow do to improve on the watermelon? Why, it's meat and it's fruit, it's water and it's wine; it is crisp as satin, and it melts in your mouth; it's like a painting to the eyes, and it tastes like a girl's red lips" (Alabama and John both blushed), "and it's all perfume and aroma, and — well, it's so full of wine we can drink a toast with it. Here's to the Women of the South! May they — may they live happily as they — deserve — and may heaven offer them — er — at last — the hospitality which — alone can — equal theirs."

Alabama clinked fork-handles with John, and drained a bumper of watermelon core. The nectar

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seemed to have gone to John's head, for he rambled on:

"I've always wanted to feel the luxury of being a guest under a Southern roof. I always thought the stories of it must be only travellers' tales, wild exaggerations. But I see the half hadn't been told. Though I come here as a supposed enemy, as an unwelcome intruder, even though I had to almost break the door down to get into your house, why, do you know, I can't help feeling the — the — er, the — oh, the — well, the something-or-other-ness of the atmosphere and the comfort? I don't know what a magnolia is like —"

Alabama said, "That is one by the wall there; I'm sorry it isn't their season."

"So that's a magnolia!" said John. "It's the first I ever saw. I've never seen one in flower — only read about 'em; but the only thing I can compare the charm of Southern hospitality to, is — magnolias in bloom."

This last burst of gallant oratory won the Yankee an invitation from Mrs. Peyton to take supper the next evening. Alabama almost swooned with amazement when her aunt invited him. The invitation was at once a delicate dismissal, and a treaty of cordiality. Before John quite knew it, he was gently wafted out of the house, and toward his own camp.

The next evening at seven he was again knocking at the door of the house — one of the dozen or so handsome old residences in the then newish town of Atlanta. Once more Dan was bowing him in,

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with an increase of unction. He rose from the bow with a rheumatic groan.

John said, patronisingly, "I'm surprised to see your hair turning white, Uncle Dan. You're not so spry as you used to be."

"No, sah," Dan mourned, "but Ah've seen the day when Ah could do a lick o' work as good as eveh Ah could."

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VIII.

THE meat was cold ham from the Peytons' own smoke-house. Mrs. Peyton carved it — the ham, I mean; not the smoke-house.

Then there was hominy; also egg-bread, served hot and in slices — with New Orleans molasses, thick and deliberate.

Then there were hot rolls; and eke beaten biscuits — cold.

For a benediction, sliced peaches and cream. [It is in March that I write these delicious words, "peaches and cream," and tears mingle with the ink as I think of the months to wait before I can prove whether or no the peach have lost its savour, and if it marry as lovingly with cream as of yore. Heaven grant you, gentle my reader, that if you read these lines at all, you may be a-reading of them somewhere and somewhen that you have but to clap your hands and say, "Peaches and cream!" and lo! before you even a plenty of peaches and cream.]

When Alabama came down, John praised her gorgeous costume. "Do you like it?" she had said. "Ah made the waist out of an old parasol."

John thought the table beautiful, with its candle-twilight. Mrs. Peyton explained: "These green candles are the wax of myrtle berries. Ouah common candles ah split sycamo' balls soaked in oil."

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That plain little supper was to John a Lord Mayor's banquet in the Guildhall. He realised the poverty of these gracious aristocrats only when Dan came rushing in all aflutter, exclaiming:

"Oh, Miss Annabel, what d'yo' reckon Ah done benn an' gone an' found?"

"What is it, Uncle Dan — gold?"

"No — betteh 'n what gol' is — it's aigs. Three bran' new fraish aigs. Them Cornfedrit sojers done carry off ev'y las' livin' hen 'ceptin' one or two what done hide somewheres. An', bress de Lawd, ef one of 'em ain't a layin' hen."

The eggs were placed on a special china plate, and regarded with as much awestruck admiration as people used to grant tomatoes, when they thought of them as ornamental to see, but poisonous to eat.

To John, after his years of camp life, and of the greedy brevity and rough service of the camp mess, — with the accent on the mess, — there was an unspeakable repose and content in crossing his weary feet under a real dining-table, of ancient wood and workmanship; laying across his knees a snowy napkin; eating, from shining old china, dishes that smacked of home life, peace, and prosperity; and looking across the table, not at the faces of ferocious and cynical men, but at the pink perfection of Alabama June Muir, and the summer lightning of her eyes.

After the supper, they adjourned to the cool and lampless rear piazza again. The gloaming was thickening swiftly, and the stars seemed very little and very remote. They gave no more light than tinsel spangles on a vast arras of thick black velvet.

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There was a solemnity to the dark and the silence, and it was enough to sit still and be part of the huge, reposeful universe.

Alabama at length said, or rather murmured than said:

"Auntie, if Misteh — if Kyunnel Mead wishes to smoke, we have no objection, have we?"

"Not the least," said Mrs. Peyton, "if he has a cigah of his own. We used to have them when Judge Peyton was alive, and it was a gre't comfoht to me to watch him smoke."

John had taken advantage of being in the city to buy some actual cigars, and he lighted one, a gentlemanly weed, of good birth and breeding. He had been trying to find courage to ask permission to smoke it. But nine-tenths of true hospitality is vicarious imagination, and the Southern women had foreseen his whim.

As he held up the brilliant fusee, he used it not to light his cigar, but as a torch to study Alabama's face. Out of the gloom she leaped in glowing beauty, painted in living colours on the cloudy, enveloping dark. Her eyes glistened strangely, her smile had the eery meaning of the smile of a witch, peering into a flame of incantation.

The match was burnt out before John realised that he had held it so far from his cigar that it was not yet alight. He struck another, and again, through half-shut eyelids, perused the girl's portrait on its dusk background.

Then he sat in that communion, that oneness with contentment that only smokers know. The red spot of light was as a ruddy little star, and the smoke

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floated away into the black, as a wee nebula drifting off into interstellar spaces. But John's fancy kept alive the living portrait of Alabama.

At length the edge of the horizon began to take on shape, to lift away from the sky it had merged into. Antennæ of radiance began to feel among the planets, and then a red ember smouldered on the horizon. John thought of the old moon that had risen flame-wise behind the haunted cabin years ago, when he was a little boy toting home Shakespeare. But his memory found the terror of that scene uncongenial with his present peace. His mind would busy itself only with the delight of reconstructing Alabama's image in hesitant mosaic on the dark.

By and by the moon was up and free from the hill, perfect in its roundness. The flush paled from its great face, and it grew smaller, and more wan, and very wistful.

Something in the mood of the moon and its insistent romance stirred in Mrs. Peyton's old heart. Either because she felt now that she was the third person that makes a crowd of two, or because she had memories of her own that these young hearts jarred with, she gently excused herself, and went in. She had a slave bring candles to the table of the room next the piazza, and sat down, not to read, but to dream.

They could see her hazily through the curtain, and she made a fair picture of beautiful white age. But the candle-glimmer streaming to the porch confused the blurred outlines of the moonshine, and quarrelled with it, in an anachronism that fretted the young man and the girl on the porch.

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Almost without knowing it, Alabama and John rose and turned their backs to the candle-light, and looked forth into the realms of the regent moon. Almost without their volition, their feet slowly descended the steps to the garden, and, finding even the paths too hard, strayed to the plushy grass.

The man and the girl, lost in the shadows, stood breathing slowly and deliciously. By a sort of planetary gravitation they were urged together, and when her soft, round shoulder touched his broad, hard breast, neither moved away. So they waited, they knew not for what. Finally John complained:

"I wish magnolias were in bloom."

But she answered, her voice tuned to the night-harmony:

"That's yo' Northehn ignorance. There's somethin' betteh than magnolias blooming now. Come oveh heah."

But her voice seemed to float in the air without source or direction. He groped for her, and found her warm hand, that even in the dark felt all pink. With clasped fingers, she led him across the lawn, into a very field of perfume, that seemed to tremble and shimmer through his soul.

"What fragrance is that?" he wondered. And she answered:

"This is the summeh-ho'se, and it's all coveh'd oveh with yellow jasmine, and the big yellow rose we call Cloth-o'-Gold."

He breathed the incense deep and long, lifted his arms and spread them, that he might take a deeper draught. And when his arms drooped, his right arm fell across her shoulders. He found both her

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hands with his left hand, and led her into the summer-house. They seated themselves on a rustic bench, his right arm about her waist, his left hand clinging still to both her hands.

She, as much a creature of the moon-mood as he, did not at all resist him. Indeed, her head sank back upon his shoulder, silk-cushioned in her hair. He bent his head above hers, and though neither could see the other, their eyes gazed and gazed. It was long before his lips dared to meet hers; it was long kisses they exchanged when they met. Now and then he cast his look upward; through the latticed walls the Southern moon gleamed and glowed, all arabesqued with shadowy leaves, with jasmine-flowers, and the roses they called the Cloth-o'-Gold. And out of the heart of his great beatitude, he could only sigh:

"Oh, the South! the South!"

But she said no word to mar the absolute perfection of the night.

"Alabama! Alabama!"

Was it his own heart that was softly voicing the sweet name of that so sweet girl?

"Alabama!"

The girl lifted her head from his shoulder, and answered, gently:

"Yes, Auntie; heah Ah am."

"You'd betteh be comin' into the ho'se, dearie; it's getting late, and the dew is fallin'."

Late! and he had forgotten the very existence of the fiction that men call time. Mournfully they left the grotto of their tryst, and stepped out into the half-day of the soaring moon. A last kiss he

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took in the pillar of shadow a kindly tree lent them. He bade her a formal good-night at the porch, and, lifting his hat to Mrs. Peyton, followed the path round the house, stumbling into aromatic shrubs and into curtains of vinery, to the front gate.

As it clicked after him, it seemed like the last closing of the gate of Eden. He moved drunkenly along the dim and lonely streets toward his camp. When a sentinel challenged him, he could not remember the countersign, and the corporal of the guard had to be called to recognise and admit him.

At last he found his lieutenant-colonel waiting for him impatiently. He was handed an ominous despatch. With a groan, he read his orders to move at once to the outer line of works.

The moon, whose rising had found him steeped in such ease of heart, at its setting found him shivering in his saddle. He was marching away from the strange, rare luxury of a woman's caresses, to the hard, noisy shops of war. He thought back upon the rapture of that evening with sullen and hungry rage. And when he thought of Lucy, it was to blame all his fickleness upon the iron harshness of his life, and to remind himself that he had refused to hold her pledged to him during his warring.

Little he knew that the same unamazed moon that had fed him lotuses, had tried, that same night, its same magic on Lucy Darr, in a far-away camp.

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IX.

LUCY, after a long and wandering saintliness, had found herself stationed with one of Grant's hard-working armies, and with a division whose major-general commanding was — who but her old playmate, Bob Wainwright? As a West Point graduate, he had been sent running up the stairs of promotion two steps at a time, and while his years were only five and thirty, his shoulder-straps were now radiant with a major-general's stars. At his age, Napoleon had worked himself up from penurious oblivion in a small island, to the imperial crown of another race. But Bob, for a man not a Napoleon, and of a soil where crowns do not grow, was doing very well, and justifying his promotions both by his good work before, and his better work after, each. He had never ceased to cherish Lucy Darr as his ideal of womanhood. She was nearly ten years his junior, but he had proposed to her at least twice a year; and was still determined to make her his.

When, in inspecting his hospitals one day, he found Lucy among the nurses, he forgot his shoulder-stars, and humbled himself before the stars under the clouds of her splendid brows. If he had shown such rank favouritism to his subordinate officers

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as he thereafter showed to Lucy and her ward and all the patients in her ward, his reputation for adamantine discipline and favouritelessness would have gone to ruin.

But she had all the partiality he could command, and flowers, fruits, comforts, and privileges innumerable came her way from a source none dared contradict. Lucy took all his kindnesses for the sake of her sick soldiers, and because they seemed to please Bob. She was so far, too, from presuming on her power that her sister-nurses felt no jealousy of her, nor any abatement of their love and admiration for her.

The very night when John and Alabama were revelling in the Southern moon strewing Atlanta with effulgent white flowers, Lucy, strolling about in seclusion to be alone with her thoughts, met, by chance, with General Wainwright, who was pacing in solitary study of his battle schemes. He forgot his enemies, his division, his brigades, and all at the sight of the loved and lovely woman from home. He walked with her, and their hearts grew tender as they gossiped on old times and home folk; and he modulated easily and imperceptibly into the old story of his devotion to Lucy.

The years had been long to her, too, and the loneliness and the strangeness of her life had made her trebly alive to the need and the charm of tenderness. The moon, that was weaving such a subtile net round John Mead in remote Atlanta, that very night was pleading with Lucy's soul, too. And General Bob pleaded his cause heartily and well. She knew he spoke from a deep need of her, and she felt

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a need of strong arms about her, of a broad shoulder to rest her heavy head upon; perhaps to cry a little upon.

But bitterly lonely as she was, when Bob spoke to her of love, and caught her to his breast, and sought her lips with his, she could think only of John Mead, and of her utter fealty to him. And she rebuffed the love at her side for the sake of the wandering love in the far South, with more severity than the former had earned; perhaps with more fidelity than the latter deserved.

Had John known this, his thoughts might have been darker as he jogged northwestward from Atlanta. But as it was he felt surly enough, and altogether abused. When he learned of General Sherman's order that all the townspeople of Atlanta must leave the city at once, he thought not at all of the stern relentlessness of war, he thought only of the grief, the anger, the hardships, the pitiful distresses of Alabama. His resentment against Sherman's act was as fierce as that of the Southern generals, who protested against it as uncivilised and inhuman.

But John was too far away to protest, or even to mitigate the trials of Alabama and her gentle-handed aunt. The current of war swept him north, and it was not his lot to share in that epic march to the sea with Sherman's men. He regretted this the more because he had never laid eyes upon the sea, and had all an inland man's passionate desire to meet an ocean.

It is a quaint commentary on the obscurities of a large campaign, that while John was so cordially

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reviling General Sherman in his inner heart, General Sherman was with equal cordiality praising John in open council; and finally nominated him brigadier-general for his shrewd bravery.

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X.

YOU must be miserably tired of this war. And so am I. But think of the weariness that must have burdened the soldiers with corns on their musket-laden shoulders, but no calloused spots on their homesick hearts. Think even more of the people at home, decrepit fathers, grandsires, and dames, mothers, wives, and sweethearts, monotonously waiting some respite from the everlasting chronicle of war news; reading every day with anxious eyes the dull, long catalogues of dead, wounded, and missing; enduring with dismal and unconscious heroism the myriad torments of a nation in the travail of a giant war.

One of John's first orders, after he had become General Mead, was to hasten to reinforce the small garrison at Altoona Pass, which General Hood began to threaten a month after he evacuated Atlanta. John, with his now famous mobility, managed to throw part only of his forces into the post, just in time to be assailed by an overpowering mass of Confederates under General French.

It was midnight when John found himself at Altoona, and a quick reckoning of noses showed that he had nineteen hundred and forty-four men between him and surrender. For a morning serenade, French gave him two hours of bombardment.

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He followed this with a polite note, advising surrender, to save a "needless effusion" of blood. John scratched off an informal reply:

"We are prepared for the needless effusion of blood whenever it is agreeable to you."

There may be doubt of the needlessness, but there can be no doubt of the effusion. For five hours they fought with a desperation not exceeded in the whole war.

Seven hundred and five of the nineteen hundred and forty-four were killed or wounded, within an ace of the thirty-seven per cent. lost in the famous Balaklava fluke.

General Sherman, a helpless gallery-god spectator, could see the smoke and hear the cannons of the conflict from Kenesaw Mountain, eighteen miles away, and he kept wig-wagging over the enemies' heads, "Hold the fort, for help is coming." When he learned that John was in command, he exclaimed:

"Mead will hold out! I know the man!"

After five hours, dismayed at John's stiff and vicious resistance, and alarmed by the columns of smoke sent up ostentatiously by reinforcements pushing to Mead's aid, General French retired, confessing a loss of eight hundred, of whom one hundred and twenty were killed. But as John's men buried two hundred and thirty Confederate braves, and kept four hundred of them prisoners, including a brigadier-general, the leader in his haste evidently overlooked a few losses.

When the Confederates had withdrawn, and John had time to take a look round and get acquainted with the garrison that had held up so pluckily its

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end in such a plucky job, he had many questions to ask.

Lieutenant-Colonel Tourtelotte, who had commanded the garrison before John reached Altoona, was severely wounded; he said to John:

"What did you think was the bravest feat of the day?"

"Well," said John, "the bravest thing that I saw was in the west redoubt. The guns there ran clean out of ammunition, and if the boys in the east hadn't sheltered the spot, the Rebs would have nabbed it sure. Finally, some fellow volunteered to scoot across that open space, and carry back some canister cartridges. The first I knew of it was seeing that lone fellow go right out into the rain-storm. By George, I never saw anybody look so lonely, either. Seemed as if he'd ought to have had an umbrella and rubber boots, to wade through the bullets. He certainly risked catching a terrible cold. But he got across. And pretty soon back he came, stumbling along, carrying a big pile of cartridges, as cool as if he was hustlin' into the kitchen from the woodshed with an armload of chips in a drivin' rain. By George, it was the durndest piece of homely sublimity I've seen for some time. I want to mention it in my report. Do you happen to know the man's name?"

"No," said Tourtelotte, "but I'll send for him." He told an orderly to go and learn the man's name, and bring him.

The orderly came back later, saluted brusquely, and said, gruffly:

"His name is Mead, same name as the General's."

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"Mead, eh?" said John. "He has a bad name. I wonder if he's a relative. Where is he?"

"He said he'd be damned if he'd come. He seems kind o' ashamed of what he done, and thinks the boys is pokin' fun at him."

"Humph! What's his first name?" said John.

"He wouldn't say; one of the fellows said it was Jim."

"Jim Mead? Jim Mead?" cried John, and instanter the general was loping like mad into the distance, his sword banging around his sabre-like legs, and threatening to throw him every minute. At length the sheath managed to jab in between his feet, and he fell — the son on his prodigal father's neck.

"Dad! you God-blessed old Dad!" he cried, hugging his father's cartridge-belt, and patting his strapless shoulders.

"My son, my son!" groaned old Jim Mead. "I couldn't stay to home and leave you to do all the family's work. So I 'listed a few month's back. When I hearn last night as how you was comin' to reinforce us, I felt safe. Hain't had a chance to call and pay my respects."

"Respects? — hell!" said John. "How's Mother?"

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XI.

THOUGH repulsed at Altoona, Hood went darting here and there like a mad bull, driving the Union troops that Sherman left behind gradually North toward the rendezvous at Nashville, Tennessee, where the old Rock of Chickamauga prepared a reception with a deliberation that tormented the impatient Unionists, and nearly lost him his command at the last moment. But Thomas would sooner resign than make a rash step, and finally, the very day after Sherman's men, like Xenophon's, rejoiced to feast their wilderness-weary eyes on the sea, on December 15th, indeed, Thomas moved.

John had participated, two weeks before, in the desperate battle at Franklin, and had sulked over the necessity of retreating, even though the enemy had suffered the more. But at Nashville there were fresh troops, new recruits many of them, who had responded to the appeal Sherman sent north for fresh levies to defend the West, while he plunged oceanward.

Some of these raw recruits were sent to John's brigade. He reviewed and inspected them to see what stuff they were. One face was familiar even in the strangeness of the soldier clothes. It was the face of Jake Strother, and he was trembling like a baby under the stage-fright of inspection.

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John sent for him afterward, and when he came into John's tent, he saluted and shivered as if he were in the presence of a divinity. John, looking up from a complicated brigade order he was devising, sang out:

"So it's you, Jake? Sit down."

"Ye-yes, sir; it's me, sir." He hit himself in the eye in a crazy salute.

John slashed off his signature, rose, seized Jake's hand, and said:

"Don't you dare to 'sir' me, sir; leastways, not when we're in here alone. Jake, it does me good to see you. Have a cigar. How'd you happen to come? How's everybody? How's Hannah? Was my mother looking well the last time you saw her?"

"Ye-ye-yes, sir — yes, Jawn."

At length he got enough of the glamour of John's shoulder insignia and general glory out of his eyes to tell how he had stayed at home just as long as he could, and had finally grieved himself sick over refusing to go at the last call.

"The doctor tried me with calomel and sassapriller and all sorts o' things, but Hanner she said, 'Doc, Jake is eatin' his heart out,' says she, ''cause he cain't go to the war,' s' she. 'It's the only war he ever had a chancet at,' she says, 'an' mos' likely,' s' she, 'it's the las' one he ever *will* git a chancet at,' she says. 'I try to git him,' s' she, 'to go, an' I tell him I'll git along all right,' s' she, 'but he won't leave me, 'specially in my condition,' she says — fer, Jawn, Hanner is — well, she's — you know."

"Congratulations, Jake; I hope it'll be as fine a man as its father."

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"Thankee, John. Wall, 'course, I wa'n't a-goin' to leave Hanner like that, but she says to the doctor, 'Doctor,' she says, 'if you don't perscribe volunteerin', you're a-goin' to lose Jake fer a patient. He'll lay down and die,' she says. I tell you, John, Hanner is one of God's own. Well, finally, the Doctor and Hanner and all jest drove me away, and the neighbours promised to take keer of Hanner, 'specially if I didn't git back in time. Your maw was turrible good about offerin' to look in often, and I know she ain't the kind that smiles and promises, and smiles ag'in and fergits."

When Jake finally went back to his tent, John smoked a cigar over him. He decided to assign Jake's company to duty far in the rear of the morrow's attack. Darrville, and a certain woman in Darrville, couldn't afford to lose Jake Strother.

And the next day was the 15th of December. The Rock of Chickamauga was ready to move. It was as when a mountain-top girds up its loins to visit the valley. When Thomas moved, his name was Avalanche. Of the Confederate army there remained nothing but chaos and débris. This ended the career of Hood's command, and wrote Finis to the war in the West.

As John rode back to the camp after the long days of furious battle and ferocious pursuit, he had a whim to hear gossip of the old town and the old townspeople. He sent again for Jake Strother. A surprised-looking soldier came in answer to the summons. It was not Jake, but a stranger who said:

"Jake was my tent-mate, sir. He — he was

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killed soon after the battle begun; yes, sir, by a spent bullet, sir. He died talkin' about Hanner and his little baby that ain't borned yet. Jake said as how he was terrible sorry he come to war. He wasn't afraid to die, but he 'lowed as how he'd ought to have stayed to home, but they drove him to it, he said, thinkin' he was heart-set on it. Too bad, sir, I call it; but them's the things that makes folks say as how wars is crool."

John thought of the time at the house-warming, when Jake and Hannah were so ridiculous and so happy, and how they looked almost beautiful as they stood in the door watching their guests away in the rain. He could see them now with his eyes shut, — Hannah shielding the lamp from the rain and the wind, Jake with his arm on her shoulder.

John waved the soldier out of the tent, and hid his face in his fists, and cried for the pity of it.

"If I had taken him into the thick of the fight," he thought, "he might have gone home safe and sound and covered with pride." And he always blamed himself for the outcome of his heedfulness.

A few pages ago we were agreeing that we were tired of this war. But still we are dragging on. And so did it. Like a hot and busy day it went its allotted course to its flamboyant sunset; in the red glare of this, Grant slowly pounded the life and heart out of Lee's starving army. Perhaps some of that red glare came up from the fiery path Sherman burned through Georgia, till he quenched the brand of devastation in the sea, and then bent northward to be in at the death, and to corner

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Johnston, while Grant, at Appomattox, accepted with almost shamefaced meekness the surrender of the haughty son of "Light-horse Harry."

When Lee surrendered on that Palm Sunday, the 9th of April, 1865, it seemed that the outburst of Northern joy would shatter the clouds. Then came the aftermath of the joy fever.

The Southern soldier trudged bitterly home, carrying only the deep scars and heartaches of long and desperate failure. The one thing he needed and yearned for was rest and a little comfort. He found such a problem as faces the pioneer in a wild and primitive land. He found his home in ashes or in decay, his stock vanished, his fields given over to weeds, his slaves restless with new liberties and strange childish fancies. The war-worn hero must take up a new life and a new battle, against new and gruesome conditions.

To the Northern soldier there was no such home-coming, and yet there was sorrow enough, God knows. The scythe that had mown the battle-fields had not failed to nip away a bud of beauty, or a white flower of aged motherhood here and there in the nooks of peace.

Mrs. Mead had contributed more than most women to the armies of her country, and had suffered in due proportion. There were the General John and his two brothers, one of them a corporal, and the father of the family, old Jim Mead. The two youngsters came home together; then a few weeks later Jim rolled into the station, with a sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve, and on his breast a medal "for distinguished and conspicuous valour."

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There was a crowd of his old cup-companions at the station, and they gave him three husky cheers, and made him many a bibulous sign of beckoning, but his new access of heroism lasted him at least till that day was over; and he went home like a respectable citizen and kissed his wife, and gave her a good hug, almost as he had used to do in years gone past.

But the Mead family was not complete till John came back, and weeks and weeks went by before he could cut the Gordian knot of red tape and break loose.

The Darrville brass band was at the station to meet him. Oh, such a band! and ouch! for the music! They played "Lo, the conquering hero comes," till it sounded like "Lo, the poor Indian!" But, fortunately, the cheers of the people drowned most of it.

John, of course, had to make a speech. That privilege almost atoned for the band. Elkanah Tew had telegraphed down the line ten important words:

"Big crowd to meet you. Better work up extempore speech."

Which John did. The mob hardly gave him time to kiss his mother, wring hands with his family and a few friends, before it began to bellow, "Speech! speech!" and yet again, "Speech! speech!"

So John delivered an oration which the Darrville *Clarion* called "probably one of the finest specimens of impromptu oratory heard in this county in the memory of the oldest inhabitant." Little vision had the editor of how John had sat in the train

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writing on his knee the skeleton of that oration, and rounding and smoothing and tinting his eloquent periods with the orator's artistic delight in the Grecian profiles of thought and shapely contours of phrases.

To-day while he was parading his radiant oratory, his eyes were restless among the crowd for one face, his mind kept saying, "Why is she not here?" and his heart kept thumping a doleful answer, "Nothing could keep her away from your triumph but death or some other helplessness."

When finally the crowd accepted John's peroration, he hastened to belabour his mother with question on question about Lucy.

She answered:

"Why, she came home with a fever she caught in the camp, and she was very ill, but she wouldn't let me write you a word about it. Then her brother — the Rebel brother — he was killed in the very last battle Lee fought. He was almost starved, and barefoot, and hardly able to walk, but he died in the last charge against Sheridan, and the news almost killed the Darrs. The old General had disowned him for a Rebel, and now he is almost insane with grief. And Lucy was so sick anyway, that they didn't dare tell her for several days. She found it out finally, and had a relapse, and they're terrible alarmed — Why, John, where you goin'?"

"To Lucy's," he called back, as he leaped into a livery-stable carriage waiting at the station, and, seizing the lines and the whip from the driver's hands, drove swiftly away.

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SIXTH BOOK

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I.

THEY had told Lucy that John was to come home that day. The news had excited her keenly, and her fever-racked forehead glowed hotter; her erratic pulse fluttered madly. She heard at last in the deep distance, the faint whistle of the train. Fitful gusts of wind brought a hint now and then of the tootling of the brass band. There followed a murmur of far-away cheering like tiny surf breaking on the pebbles of a little lake.

"First he will go home with his family, of course; and his dear mother — how glad she'll be to see him," thought the white girl, in her bed of pain. "Then they'll all have such a jolly supper together. And then perhaps — after that, — maybe he might stroll over to ask how I am. Or he'll surely come to-morrow — if he isn't too busy."

To ease the drudgery of time, she asked her nurse to make a bouquet of such early pioneer flowers as the new-born month of May had coaxed out of the mellowing earth.

"You might comb my hair again, please, before you go; and give me a cool, fresh pillow," she sighed.

Even as the nurse was looping back the beautiful long hair about the snowy pallor of Lucy's face, and even as Lucy, weakly confidential, was wailing,

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"I don't know how I can live so many hours without seeing him," there was a sound which her memory hinted was the clatter of musketry in a skirmish; but she soon recognised it as the hurried approach of hoofs. The noise stopped short; there was the squeak of the old gate; some one came running up the path and on to the porch; a man's anxious voice; the glad treble of her mother's welcome; feet climbing the stairs with hasty stealth — her mother opened the door and beamed in like the first cordial morning of spring.

"Who'd you s'pose has come to see ye?"

But she was eclipsed by a sudden dark form, and in rushed — I need not tell you who it was, nor whether the presence of the mother and a strange nurse, or the absence of any published betrothal, or any other formality prevented the newcomer from seating himself on the edge of the bed, and gathering into his arms the white-gowned, frail ghost of the strong, sturdy, beautiful young queen who had filled his arms so plumply and well three years and more ago.

The red full lips that had carried such strength and sweetness in their speech and their kiss, were now lean and wan, and most needful of a borrowed richness.

Lucy's pride suffered a shock at being found so weak, so helpless, so "troublesome and useless," as she phrased it.

"John, boy," she complained, "I'm awfully ashamed to have you find me like this."

"Ho, ho!" he laughed, "I'm glad of it. I like it. It's high time you were leaning on me a little. I

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owe you many a lean, many a boost-up, little Lucy. You've got a mortgage on me, and I don't care how soon you foreclose. Why, Mrs. Darr, this girl came through the two lines of Rebs and Yanks there at Lexington, and found me in such shape that my own mother would have been almost ashamed to own me. You wouldn't have recognised me without a label. Whiskers? I looked like a sick bearded lady. And I used to cry if they looked at me; I'd cry like a baby one minute and fight like a wildcat the next. And this girl, this Lucy, she soothed me and calmed me, and knew what I wanted before I knew myself; and she bolstered me up, and saved my life a dozen times in a dozen different ways. Why, it's a pleasure to find her like this. She needs a good rest and a good nursing, and it gives me a chance to pay off a little of the interest on the mortgage."

In John's words there was a stimulus, in his presence cheer, and in his kiss, which she had not known these three years, milk and bread for her famished heart.

"As the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governess of North Carolina," John observed, "'Three years is a long time between kisses.'"

Lucy sat up, her thin white arms about him, her fingers flitting about his hair and cheeks, till her strength was gone. Then he gave her back to her pillow, and holding her two hands in both his huge brown paws, he gabbled on like a garrulous brook.

The nurse came back by and by with an armload of flowers. Some she had plucked from the sparse treasures of the garden, which had just begun to turn out its brand-new, paint-fresh wares. But

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others had just been brought to the house by a bevy of children that had come from the woods, where their fellow child, their playmate, Spring, was scattering her toys and knick-knacks in sheer wantonness of youth.

There were wood-daisies, and Johnny-jump-ups, and the shapely blossoms of the May-apple, and crocuses, the trillium, the hepatica, bluebells like purple sprays of dew, and spring-beauties like tinted snowflakes, and white "boys-breeches," prettier than their name.

Much ado there was about finding vases enough for them all, and some had to be strewn over the coverlet of the bed, like a silk brocade. Still John talked on. He had three year-fuls of suppressed gossip and restrained chatter to unload. And Lucy breathed in his presence and spirit indistinguishably with the fragrance of Spring that had come up-stairs with the flowers.

In the very crisis of one of his most thrilling stories John noted that Lucy's hands were passive in his clasp, that her eyelids were down, that her breathing was slow and sedate.

The door-knob rattled; the hinges whined; in came Doctor Leith with a professional smile carefully arranged on his face. John put the finger of silence to his lips. Doctor Leith tiptoed over, stared at Lucy, exchanged his professional for a real smile, whistled inaudibly, tiptoed out again, beckoning John to follow.

John cautiously disengaged his hands from Lucy's, and stole from the room like a thief. Doctor Leith closed the door as if his life hung on a squeak,

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and tiptoed down the stairway before he would trust himself to words. Mrs. Mead and the nurse joined what the French call the head-to-head.

"She's asleep!" the Doctor exclaimed in a shrill whisper. The women held up their hands incredulously.

"And in the middle of my best story," grumbled John.

"It's the first real sleep for days," said the Doctor.

"And nights," added the hollow-eyed nurse.

"I begin to hope now," said Doctor Leith. And the others looked frightened at the danger he had implied for the first time.

"If she gets sleepless again," John grimaced, "send for me. I've got several more good stories."

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II.

TAKING up civil life again after four years of civil war was no easy thing. The militarism that had been implanted with such pains had set its roots deep and everywhere in John's mind. The cogs of discipline and subordination had acquired a clockwork precision. The laws of commerce with a competitor who was to be driven out of business at all costs and by any means, were disconcerting to a man who came back among his neighbours and friends, and must win their money by winning their respect and their good will, among rivals who must be fought with courtesy and fairness, and defeated without being made hostile.

John went first to Judge Orme's office, but he unfortunately had just taken in another man as his partner and the heir to his practice. In the few other law offices there was a like dearth of chance. John thought a little while of going into the regular army; but he decided that he had had a sword slapping his thigh long enough. He thought a long while then of commencing lawyer in some other town.

"I've got to begin at the bottom anyway; I might as well begin somewhere where the top is worth climbing for," he said to Elkanah Tew.

"But the people here know you and like you, and you're not among strangers," said Elkanah.

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"Yes," growled John, "the people here know me, and they know I've forgotten all the law I ever knew, and haven't thought of any code but the military code for four years. Horace Greeley said, 'Go west, young man, and grow up with the country.' Well, I'm far enough west now, and I think I'll go east and try to grow up on the country."

"John, my lad," said Elkanah, "Rosalind and I have been talkin' about you a heap. We've had to do a lot of scrimpin' and close-parin' to get along, and while we was scrimpin', we managed somehow to scrimp a teeny mite too much, and we find to our surprise that we've got cluss onto four thousand dollars in the bank, and the farm is weeded clear of mortgages, too. We don't quite know how it happened, but there's that money rottin' away in the bank, drawin' a little interest like a lazy man draws his breath; and we don't know what to do with it. So we — wall, we — kind o' — you see — it's — Rosalind, you tell him."

"Well, John, Elkanah and me we says to each other, we says, ''Pears like a sin and a shame that that there money ain't a-doin' nobody any good. And there's John who's be'n like a son to us, sent by the Lord to take the place of the childern Heaven never see fit to send us — and John, he's be'n away fightin' fer his country, and gittin' all wore out and wounded, and comin' back in all his glory, and havin' to set down and starve like he was a green law-student jest off a farm instead of a brigadier-general that all the country's proud of. Now,' says Elkanah to me, he says, 'if John only had a little money to tide him over the starvation-point,' says

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he, 'so's he could hold up his head like what he ought to,' he says, 'why, it would be fine,' he says. And I says, 'That's so,' s' I, 'and what's the matter,' I says — 'of aour,' — er — well,— humph! — y' see — Elkanah, you tell him."

"Well, John, it's kind o' hard to put it jest right, but — er — well — of course, we love you like you was our own blood and kin and — er — well — you see —"

"Yes," said John, "I see two angels on earth that would take the little store they've laid up for their old age, and entrust it to a fly-away stranger to squander. Uncle Elkanah, have you forgotten what your old friend Polonius says about the danger of lending money to your friends? Besides, I haven't any kind of security to give you."

"Well, I'll resk it," said Elkanah, "Shakespeare or no Shakespeare. I know William purty well, but I know John a durned sight better. A shake of your hand is better s'curity than gov'ment bonds."

"No, Uncle Elkanah and Aunt Rosalind, you've done more than your share for me. I won't borrow a penny of your money. Not a penny. I'll scrape along somehow. After all, I guess I'd better not go out of town to start, for Mother's here, and Lucy's so sick, and you two are here — and well, this is my home. So I'll swing out a shingle of my own right here in Darrville. I've got enough army-pay left to buy the shingle, and a desk, and a couple of chairs, and to open the office. But I can never thank you enough for thinking of me as you have done. God bless you, and good night!"

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John opened his office, and flew his shingle unaided. His office was always crowded with people who wanted to talk to the distinguished general, for the warmth of the light reflected from greatness, or for the pleasure of roaring over his endless fund of stories, or for the excitement of hearing him argue politics.

The problems of the reconstruction of the seceded Southern States were serious enough, anyway. The fanatic assassin who killed Abraham Lincoln, murdered not only the biggest soul in our history, but the best friend and the shrewdest judge of the South as well. The man who succeeded this lowly-sublime son and preserver of his people was the saddest possible throw that could have come from the dice-box of chance.

The tangle of theory and the garbage of fraud that were jammed into the carpet-bag government of the prostrate South were more than the Republican party could have lugged to success, had the old rival party been reorganised and reënlisted.

There was politics enough and to spare, and talk was free, and it was hard to say which was, and which was not, treason to the party. John admired the South, and loved it for itself, and now that its chief evil was amputated and gone, he was for dealing with it in all honesty, patience, and trust. His office became an arena of wrangling and railing. Through all the fog, he loomed clearer and higher as a man moved by logic, by a few elemental doctrines of human liberty and society, and thrilled with the power and the right to assume and retain authority. It began to be said, more and more

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openly, that he was the man to succeed the present Congressman from that district, especially as this man had been too careless of appearances in the gigantic steals he had engineered in various contracts for war supplies. All John needed, they said, was funds and a lot of log-rolling.

So John found himself in the thick of politics. Prominent wire-pullers smote him on the back, smoked his cigars, and borrowed his money, returning it in the coin of blarney. But to his office came never a client or a case, save possibly a chance to collect a bill that every one else had found hopeless; or a chance to defend such fool criminals as were careless enough to perform their feats before an imposing array of witnesses.

This was not encouraging. Neither was the state of Lucy's health.

Every day you could have seen John's horse, Othello, no longer a steed o' war champing the frothy bit on fields of battle, but a palfrey of love nibbling the shrubs within reach of the Darrs' hitching post.

In the ozone of John's electric cheer Lucy gradually grew strong enough to leave her bed for an easy chair. Finally, on an eventful and exciting day, she walked across her room unaided. In time she was helped down the stairs. And at last she could sit on the porch.

There she stopped, and the next step — to pace the garden and mingle with the thronging flowers, or to walk out to the gate to welcome John — these next things she could not seem to achieve.

All day she sat on the porch, only existing till

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John came galloping into view, swinging his hat in message from the very horizon. Every horse that came clattering up, every wayfarer that trudged, every wagon or carriage, she watched in the nervous hope that John might be coming to take her by surprise.

Doctor Leith plied her in vain with all his medicines, advices, and devices. He could not lift her from the sluggish dreariness of invalidism. John's cajoleries and commanding and enticements were of equal vanity. Then she began to slip backward, to lose even the feeble glimmer of her cheer, and the sturdiness that had always upheld her.

The warmest, most coaxing breeze chilled her. The jovial sun was wintry upon her. She retreated to her room; and at length forsook even the window where she had watched for John's coming.

One day he found her again in her bed, again listless, white, dejected, as when he had first come home from the war. She was ebbing away from him as the soft tide from the encircling arms of a bay.

Doctor Leith came, too, as on that other day, but found her, this time, not soothed to peace by John's presence. The two men left the house together, and left Lucy tormented and tossing with fever and distress.

As the Doctor, shaking his head gravely, was about to step into his buggy, John stopped him, and with a harrowed, haggard look, demanded:

"Doctor Leith, in God's name, what are you going to do to save that poor girl? You must see that she is drifting farther and farther away — what are you going to do?"

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"General Mead, there is nothing I can do. I can hardly even hold out a hope to myself. The case is beyond me. There is no disease, or constitutional defect to account for her decline. If she could be got away from here, she might improve. But her home life — well, her brother is dead; her father is wounded, and worn out, and peevish; her mother is — well, a trifle nagging and exhausting even to the strongest of us. Lucy has about half an hour of cheerfulness a day — when you are with her. The rest of the day is one long agony. Her mother means well; she's good-hearted, as we say, but she can't help being tiresome, and excitable, and exciting. Lucy ought to go far away into the mountains somewhere. But there's nobody for her to go with, nobody who would be the right sort of companion, and I'm about ready to give up. I'm driving past your home, General. Get in and lead your horse, and we'll talk it over."

"Thanks, Doctor, I'm going the other way."

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III.

THE Tews were at their supper-table. Uncle Elkanah was munching a triangle of rhubarb, or "pie-plant" pie, covered with sugar and a sprawling coverlet of cream. With one side of his mouth he was munching this kickshaw, with the other he was mumbling Shakespeare — one of the sonnets.

> "My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
> So long as youth and thou are of one date: —"

Mrs. Tew was mentally reckoning how many socks there were to mend that night.

> "For all that beauty that doth cover thee
> Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
> Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me.
> How can I, then, be elder than thou art? —"

She heard in counter rhythm the faint, loudening approach of one who rode swiftly. It had not yet caught Elkanah's ear, humming to another meter:

> "Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;
> Thou gavest me thine, not to give back again."

Dreamily Elkanah let the leaves whirr under his thumb, until with a quick finger he stopped at

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another sonnet, and read on, heedless of the sounds outside:

> "If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
> Injurious distance should not stop my way."

Rosalind was listening to the silence of the hoofs, abruptly checked outside; to the soft pad of feet running up the path.

> "But, ah, thought kills me that I am not thought,
> To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone—"

There was a short, sharp, policeman-like knock, the door was wrenched open; in strode John Mead, wild-eyed in the sudden light, wilder-eyed with excitement. The Tews regarded him in amaze, around the lamp that gilded them with blotches of light.

"Why, hello, John! jest in time fer supper. Rosalind, my dear, fetch a plate; pull up a chair, my boy."

"Don't want supper, thanks. Say, Uncle Elkanah, you offered to lend me some money awhile ago."

"Yep."

"Offer still good?"

"Long as the money is."

"How much can I have?"

"Much's I got."

"What s'curity?"

"You're sayin', 'Much 'bliged, Uncle!'"

"Well, I'll take a couple of thousand."

"Good for you. Can you wait till to-morrow? I don't keep it in a stockin' here."

"God bless you. What interest do you want?"

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"The idee that it's doin' you some good."

"Well, I pay the highest interest the law allows, or I don't take it."

"'Scuse my cur'osity, but what ye goin' to do with it? You ain't goin' to leave town?"

"For a while."

"Business?"

"Nope. Pleasure."

"I want to know!"

"Goin' to marry."

"Marry? Well, don't that beat all! Who?"

"Who d'you s'pose?"

"But I thought she was down sick?"

"Is."

"What do her folks say?"

"Haven't told 'em."

"What she say?"

"Haven't told her."

"Well, say, John, am I or are you?"

"What?"

"Crazy."

"I am, I guess. Good night."

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IV.

A SLEEPLESS night in the toils of a weariness that was too tired to rest, a weakness too great to release itself in sleep; the long, tiresome, stupid, ritual of daybreak; a bitter resentment of the laziness of a family that did not rise with the birds, but dawdled in bed till half-past six; a famished hunger that despised every proffer of food; a yearning to have done with the sickly chores of keeping alive — this was the mood of Lucy Darr, hitherto the helplessly cheerful, the inexpugnably brave.

If she could only weary through the day till John came, and then in his arms resign life, as the sunset glow gently released itself from the sky — that was the best, the all she found heart to wish for.

Before she knew it, he was at her door. At this hour in the morning! With a morning humour of skylark gaiety that had irritated her in the faces of her family and her nurse, after their night of indecently sound sleep. In John's face the aurora light seemed as fit as in the rosy East. And he carried flowers in his hand, and in his kiss there was a strange summons to smile.

"Couldn't find any orange-flowers in town, so I brought these locust-blossoms. I think they've the

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sweetest smell of all the perfumes in the world. I could reach them from my saddle as I rode this way, so they'll have to do in place of orange-blossoms."

"What's all this talk about orange-blossoms? Who's the bride?"

"You are, of course, and I'm the groom. Not a very good one, Othello thinks. I didn't stop to curry him this morning,— or to feed him."

"I'm afraid I must be losing my mind," wailed Lucy, in a fright; "I can't seem to understand you."

"Well, it's like this, my sweet. I've been a bachelor too long. Got to get married to-day, and if you don't grab me, I'll propose to the nurse."

The nurse, who had been meant for a spinster from her cradle, giggled and blushed in pathetic futility, and ran away as the guilty who flee when no man pursueth.

"If this were April first —" Lucy began.

"But it isn't; it's the first of June — the month of brides, and I've dropped the pillow in front of you. You're It."

He knelt at her side and kissed her. She was in a strange flutter, and he had to explain, over and over, why he had chosen so sudden, so strange, so wild, so insistent a proposal. Finally he had to grow serious, and tell her that it was to save her very life that he had come to take her away.

"You saved my life, Lucy, my own. And here's where I get even."

"John, do you suppose I'd let you sacrifice yourself, your career, the money you've borrowed, everything, to pay a debt of gratitude that you don't owe? I'd die a thousand times first."

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"You can't help yourself. You've got nothing to say about it."

"John, I don't want your pity. I'd hate myself to have your pity. And I'd loathe your gratitude."

"It isn't pity that moves me. Gratitude is only a minor consideration. I love you with all my soul. My one hope is to save you for myself. It is the fear of losing you that makes me refuse to wait another week to take you away from here."

"It's pity, I tell you! it's pity, and not love!" she cried.

"Was it pity I felt, girlie mine, when we stood there under the rose-bushes that rainy night, and I kissed you? My lips grow thirsty every time I think of it! Was it pity that I felt when we talked there by the gate the night before I went to the war, and I told you that you were my one ambition? Was it pity that late afternoon in the red sunset, and the red autumn woods, when our horses stood so close together that I could reach out and hug you to my heart? You know that I have loved you since we were little tots together, since long before that day when the carriage broke down, and you and the others ran to our cabin in the rain. When we were in school together, when I was trying to freeze out the other fellows, when I was trying to read law-books, through the vision of your face that floated over the pages, when I was in camp, when I was in battle, when I was wounded and alone there in Lexington — it was always, 'I must wait and work to win Lucy Darr.' Now I can make you mine. I have borrowed the money from the future, so that the future may be all enriched and glorified by life

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with you. If you don't marry me now, you will die, and I shall be left alone, all my work, my waiting in vain, all my hope turned to ashes. Is it kind of you to refuse to grant me my supreme wish? Is it kind of you to be suspicious of my love when it has been before your eyes so many years? Is it right of you to refuse to live and grow strong, when you can make me so happy, and make my life worth while?"

Before these last arguments her resistance was shamed away. An appeal to her altruism was always a sure appeal. She clasped her arms about John's neck, laughing and crying at the same time.

"If you'll only hush that Fourth of July oration, I'll do anything you ask."

As she wept deliciously, the family came in, and John turned his catapultic arguments on them. They were inclined to more violent opposition, but Doctor Leith appeared in the nick of time, and, taking them out into the hall, threatened them and cowed them with his doctorial edicts.

When John appeared, General Darr shook his hand and blessed him, with a flow of sacred language of more or less profane effect. Mrs. Darr wept all over him, and upbraided him for stealing her daughter from her, and, finally, at the height of her indignation, kissed him a teary kiss, and called him, "my son."

John got away as soon as he could. He had already told his mother of his plan, and had found in her the hearty support she always gave his heart's desires. He hurried to his office, to close up what business he had not yet acquired. He found an

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impatient gang of politicians, indignant at being so long locked out of their pet loafing-place. When he announced that he was about to leave town, and enter matrimony, there was a dearth of congratulations.

Old Judge Orme, the political Cæsar, grew very stern and dictatorial.

"General," he growled, "we have said that you could be the next Congressman from this district, if you would stay here and work hard, but this marriage will be the ruin of you, sir. If you can scrape up funds enough to get married, you'd better employ them in a campaign for election. I warn you, sir, that if you go on with this marriage, you will never go to Congress."

"To hell with Congress," John roared.

"Sir, your speech is high treason!" thundered Judge Orme.

"'If that be treason, make the most of it!'" quoted John. And he proceeded to shove his papers in mass into a drawer, and lock his desk, and write out a sign to paste on his door:

JOHN MEAD

ATT'Y-AT-LAW

OUT OF TOWN

WILL RETURN IN A MONTH OR TWO

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V.

IN her long years of girlish plans and musings, Lucy had dreamed of almost every kind of wedding, from an elopement after dark down a wobbly ladder, to a ceremony performed in a captive balloon at the county fair. But she had never, in her maddest nightmares, visioned a parson standing on one side of a couch, while the bridegroom stood at the other, holding a hand whose sacred finger was so slim that the ring had to be tied on with a white ribbon.

"Why didn't you get a ring to fit?" Lucy queried, in disgust.

"Because it's your business, from now on, to grow up to fit the ring," John answered.

The wedding had come the very day after the proposal, and there was a wild scramble preparing it.

Lucy was dressed in a travelling gown that had been improvised and telescoped together with some haste. But she was too weak to stand, and had been brought down to the parlour, and ensconced on the prickly and slickery haircloth sofa. The room was alive with flowers, and blooming with neighbours, friends, and relatives, from miles around.

The news had travelled by the wireless telegraphy of gossip. The sentiment of curiosity prevailed

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over that of formality, and those who had not been invited by special couriers, came anyway.

Mrs. Darr had worked off about ten pounds of flesh, — which she could well spare, — getting things cooked up for the indoor barbecue served to the guests. There was, of course, the wedding-cake, cut up in small bits and distributed as souvenirs, to be placed under the pillows of the neighbourhood, and dreamt on that night.

Pies and pickles, caraway cookies and piccalilli, ham and apple butter, dried beef and preserves, jellies and buttermilk, and whatever else could twist the stomachs of 1865, made part of the lunch served to those unfortunate guests. It ensured their dreaming many a dream that night; but if the wedding-cake under those pillows had made those dreams come true, as it professed to do, — ugh! the inferno of crime and horror it would have made of that peaceful vale!

Fortunately, the bride and bridegroom did not tamper with the feast. After the ceremony was over, and John had got all his "I do's" mixed with his "I will's," and tried to put the wedding-ring on his own hand, and had finally been ushered into blissful matrimony in a cold sweat of confusion, Mrs. Darr invited every one out into the dining-room.

Finding himself left alone with Lucy by the hungry mob, John seized the opportunity and the bride, caught Lucy up in his arms, navigated her through the door, and toted her gaily down the steps, and out to the waiting carriage. They chuckled at their escape; but that old tattle, the gate, gave a squeal

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of alarm. Peter Platt, who was among the uninvited, and snooping about, warned the crowd in the dining-room, and the wedding-guests poured out of the house in pursuit.

The driver, at John's command, made a great ado of gathering up the lines, but I suspect his sincerity. Anyway, the horses made no start till John, rising and leaning over, ripped the whip from its socket and laid it on with a vim. The horses broke away, but not in time to save the couple from the snowstorm of rice that was flung by the double handful. But Silas Stibbs managed to take John just back of the ear with an old shoe, so every one felt better — except the famous musicians, whose privilege it was to give all bridal couples a serenade, in which a tin can sang gaily on a string, while milk-pans, cowbells, cracked dinner-horns, and general hullabaloo combined in dulcet shivaree.

John and Lucy escaped this initiation rite, and the loping horses soon took them out of hearing of the rustic wit and hilarity.

John forgot the bruise of the old shoe in the excitement of the elopement, and Lucy and he sat very prim as they passed through Darrville, blissfully ignorant of the streamers of white ribbon flying from the back of their carriage.

At the station there was a large crowd that could not be escaped, and it was hours before John could get all the rice out of the back of his neck, and weeks before they could feel safe in unfolding any shawl or handkerchief in public without expecting a downpour of the white grain.

It was small consolation to their embarrassment

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that they furnished vast amusement to the frankly curious passengers on the train throughout their long journey. But in time their destination was reached; in time they almost ceased to be a novelty to the guests at the hotel. The change of scene worked all the miracles in Lucy's health that Doctor Leith had prophesied. In two weeks she was strong enough to leave the staring corridors of the hotel, and plunge with John into the solitude of the wooded mountains, where they camped in a paradise as dual as Adam's and Eve's, and where a love-life perfected and complete embowered them.

They got back close to nature in those weeks together, and the sweet strangeness, and the keen raptures of their new partnership welded their souls together as in a furnace of joy. Lucy's nostrils inhaled the pine fragrance as a vapour of healing, and day after day of hunting, fishing, trapping, or exploring, made her strong as a young nymph. Her thirst was refreshed with living water scooped by hand from the brooks; her hunger with fish and flesh that their own skill had brought to the pan, simmering over the pine-knot blaze.

As for the long famine of her heart, it found its plenty in keeping stride with John during the day-time wanderings; and in musing in his arms before the crackling camp-fire, under the moonlight sifting through the sieve of the tree-tops.

To John, who had before idolised Lucy for her lofty beauty, and her nobility of mind and heart, but who now knew her thorough womanhood, there was no abatement of his reverence for her, but only a warmer, cosier glow upon the religion of his love.

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In this deep intimacy, this divine serenity of all delight, he looked back upon his flirtation with Alabama, and felt only an amused half-remorse, as one smiles back upon some boyish mischief. For, as he thought of Lucy, the splendid creature she was, Alabama fluttered away like a pretty butterfly driven before a zephyr. He was glad for their three sakes that his affair with Alabama had been only a little flirtation, that he had only kissed and ridden away; it was a fleeting lunacy due to the Southern moon. So the man jauntily summoned his past before his own conscience, and lightly dismissed it with benign clemency.

John had put Alabama's name on the list of those who were to be sent announcements of his wedding. When he came back at last to Darrville, with Lucy exuberantly strong and round, and beautifuller than ever, he found in his crowded post-office box an envelope with a statement that, two weeks before, the Rev. Jeremy Wesley had joined in wedlock ex-Captain Lee Carteret, of the Confederate army ("Who the devil is he?" said John), and Miss Alabama June Muir. ("Whew!" said John.) The minx had been engaged all the time, then, and those kisses he stole in Atlanta belonged to another man all the while! No wonder the fruit was so sweet. But what deceivers women are, to be sure!

Others things also he found out when he settled down in Darrville — by this time a much grown young city from the freckle-faced, bare-footed, tow-headed village it was when you first saw it, back in 1846. John learned that the Republicans in convention had been so much in need of a candidate

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with a gleaming war record, that they had been forced to nominate him after all, in spite of his traitorous desertion of the cause for the mere trifle of getting married.

John caught at the bauble. If he were elected, his living would be assured, at least for one term. If he failed, he could at worst only be where he was now — at the bottom of the ladder, with a number of borrowed dollars in his pocket, and many other borrowed dollars spent in saving and winning the wife of his desire. So in he plunged, and the maelstrom of politics took him round and round the giddy swirl. And in the infinitude of infinitesimal demands on his time, his strategy, his oratory, his purse, the plain little rented house in which he had installed his beautiful queen-rose of a wife saw far less of him than he or she could wish, or had ever foreseen. But the feud between Ambition and Love had just begun.

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VI.

IN the novels, all that leads up to marriage is the plot, the marriage ceremony is the curtain — the rest is epilogue for the imagination. In real life, all that goes before the marriage is likely to be mere prologue to the actual drama. Of this latter sort was the career of John and Lucy Mead. But the prologue has will-o'-the-wisped me into such lengthy meanderings, that when I raise the curtain, lo, the evening is almost gone.

Still, the published biographies of John Mead will, as I've said before, tell you the busy public life of the man. This book, which aims only to supplement them with the story of his real life inside his home and inside his heart, can then shake off the luggage of his famous career. I need not recount the cyclone of his eloquence that swept away the opposition to his first election, as cavalry beats down a wheat-field. I'll assume that you know of his term after term of notable public service in Congress — which not to know argues one's self unknown. If you are familiar with that, you are familiar with his elevation to the Senate, and his career there, the immortal services he rendered to his country, and his fame by winning friends for this neglected bill, and enemies for that powerful measure, by standing for honesty and publicity in all things, by being a patriot first,

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and then a partisan, or not at all a partisan where the Faction seemed to him to hamper the welfare of the Fatherland.

It was his independence, his high-souled courage, his search-light candour, his insubordination to party discipline when its red tape seemed to tie up and trip the good of the people, that led old Judge Orme to say to him:

"John Mead, if you hadn't always been so disgustingly honest, and so dad-blamed outspoken, you could have been President of the United States."

So everybody said: "Senator Mead won't kow-tow to the party bosses, and Lord knows they won't kow-tow to him. They'd as soon hitch an unbusted colt to a hearse, as nominate John Mead for President. First thing you know, he'd be going in for civil service reform all through, and he'd leave a good man in office, even if he was a Democrat, and even if a dozen hard-workin', straight Republicans were hankering for his place."

But, in spite of all, the time came when Judge Orme and other party engineers actually offered John Mead the nomination for the Presidency. The real How and Why of this is not commonly known. It had gradually transpired to public knowledge that the Democrats were going to nominate the Hon. Raymond Sloane.

It was the Democrats' turn to win; Sloane was known for a man of universal popularity with his party. Whom had the Republicans to put against him? The Old Reliables named half a dozen prominent politicians, who had been absolutely faithful to the party, even at the cost of certain infidelities

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to the commonweal. But the shrewder thinkers, with their ears to the ground, heard a popular murmur for a man of brilliant and winsome fame, of that sort of fame that tingles with magnetism, and has the magnet's pull.

These qualities Sloane's fame had. The rub would be, to find some Republican who could annul his pull with a stouter, swamp his billow of enthusiasm with a tidal wave of it.

The mention of Raymond Sloane's name recalled to certain people a scene in a closed session of the Senate, when, for the first time on record, Sloane met his match.

The bill known as the Sloane Bill, from the fact that Sloane had devised it, and gave to the passing of it his whole ardent enthusiasm and skill, had absorbed the Senate's time and excitement till every Senator was on the wire-edge of irritability with suspense.

John was bitterly opposed to the bill, since he believed it to be class-legislation of the worst sort. He said:

"There are few Americans so poor that they will suffer noticeably from the tax this bill proposes; it means at most a few cents apiece in the course of the year. But those pennies are to be piled up into great copper mountains, to be fenced in and mined for the benefit of men who are already rich. And I tell you, any law that makes the rich richer by making the poor poorer, is an iniquitous law, though the tax should nip off only one feather from the tail of the eagle on every tenth one of the poor man's pennies. The principle such a law is built on is

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a vile principle; and the law will stink with that principle. You cannot build an effective flower-garden round the walls of a pork factory."

Sloane was an aristocrat in birth and breeding. John and he were antipodal. John nagged him to desperation with his wit, gadflied him with his homeliness, and stirred him by his vigour. On this day Sloane was in an ugly humour, anyway, and John's assault on his pet bill infuriated him. He rose, and with that parliamentary paraphrase that had become second nature to him, he implied that it was only natural that certain persons should so wofully misunderstand the purpose of the bill under consideration, since its principles were somewhat over the heads of those whose parentage was no higher than a village washerwoman and a town drunkard. The minute Sloane insinuated the cruel thrust, he would have given his right hand to withdraw it.

But John had risen, not aflame with anger, but a little pale and unwontedly calm. He drawled:

"Parliamentary language, Mr. President, is not meant to conceal thought; but to break it gently. Everyone here knows that the words just spoken cannot be taken as referring to any one in particular, and every one here also knows that they refer directly to me. I don't deny that my mother was a village washerwoman. It was her misfortune to be brought to that lowly toil. But I thank God, that she always bore the reputation of being a most excellent washerwoman. And I have never, since my childhood, thought of that humble necessary labour of cleansing the soiled linen of this world without thinking

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how my mother beautified and ennobled and hallowed it.

"As for my poor father — well, as some people are cursed with a sharp tongue to deal cutting, stealthy, underhanded insults with, so my poor father was cursed with a tongue that craved liquor. And, perhaps, he was called 'the town drunkard,' though, until this day and in this place, no one ever had the courage — or the meanness — to call him so in my hearing. But suppose he was all that the term implies, still, for all that, if I were given my choice of being here to-day in the shoes of the distinguished gentleman who preceded me on this floor, or of lying in the grave where my dead father is, I swear I'd choose his grave, for upon his breast is his country's medal won by as valorous a deed as ever man performed."

The defence of his kindred wrought John slowly to a white heat of fervour. He fastened his eye upon Sloane, and grappling him both as remembrancer to cautious choice of phrase, and as foeman to destroy, he launched out into a long attack upon the aristocratic Sloane, his bill, his creeds, his career, his whole individuality.

John's speech was more than this; it was a clarion Pindaric ode for democracy, for equality, for not only the rights of the common people, but for their intelligence, their honesty, their ardour, their magnificence, and the magnificence of the sons that come from their loins. Those who heard that speech regretted that there were no reporters there to take it down. Like Sheridan's thrilling onslaught on Warren Hastings, it lives only in the memory of Rumour

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as a thing of vague and awful majesty. The words are lost for ever, and the impression was only that of some long and absolute hurricane, whose separate terrors cannot be recalled.

At the fiercest height of the tirade, Sloane was brave enough to try to silence the simoom by baring his breast to it. He rose at his desk and standing erect with folded arms gazed steadfastly and straight into John's flashing eyes. But John was so far from being cowed by this defiance that he rejoiced in it, as when the Rebels came out of their trenches and he could charge them home. His fierce eloquence flashed and crackled about the heads of his enemy as a whip-lash about a pilloried slave.

And when John's peroration had ceased to resound, and he had sunk into his seat, trembling with the aftermath of excitement, still Sloane stood there transfixed, "a standing corpse," as one said. So he stood, till a friend plucked his elbow; then he tottered and dropped into his seat. For a time there was in the Senate the awesome silence that follows a thunderbolt. A little later Sloane rose and left the Senate-chamber. To a colleague, who aided him to his carriage, he said:

"Campbell, I wish I were dead. I would rather die a thousand deaths than encounter that man again."

This scene was not recorded in the newspapers, but when, years afterward, Sloane was mentioned as the Democratic candidate for Presidency, and the Republicans were casting about for some one to pit against him, a few Senators recalled the time when John Mead had annihilated him. And they started

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the ball rolling. It met many an obstacle, but it flew on, gaining in size and impetus constantly till it grew irresistible.

So John Mead, risen from what you know, was visited by a committee of powers behind the throne, and offered their support in a campaign for "the highest office in the gift of the American people." You know that well enough. But did you know that, after the first impulsive thrill of acceptance, after the committee had gone, leaving him dizzy on the brink of all his dreams and ambitions, John found himself praying that he might lose the nomination; that he was gagged from refusing it only by seeing how his declarations that he would not accept it would be only taken as an adroit and proper pose; that of all things on earth, this last, this longed-for peak of his ambition, was the thing he feared the most?

Did you know that the cause of his dread was his feeling that the nomination would mean to him not a national honour, but a national disgrace; and that the instrument of this public shame would be his wife, his beloved Lucy?

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VII.

AS a fire kindled upon a hearth chatters and laughs and flaunts its joy in leaping flames, then subsides to a calmer cheer, to a blaze less alert but more warm, less yellow but rosier and cosier, and to a steadfast and purring contentment; so the young wedlock of John and Lucy Mead had quieted from its flashing ecstasy to a deep glow; the fire had settled deeper into the fuel of its life; and it lit up a place that was no longer an Eden of two isolated lovers; but a home, where a man and his wife found love abiding for each other, and an overplus for the little children that came with the years and clustered about their knees.

Through all his wrestling with success, John found always in Lucy not only solace and encouragement, but help also, and shrewd wisdom and strength to lend to his weaker days, and hopefulness as a lamp for his blackest nights of failure. The guerdon of her sure support was the equality of the modern life, the democracy of the American home, so much nobler than the hideous egotism of the old patriarchal sultanry or the brutal *patria potestas* of Rome.

"I could not admire a human being who bowed unquestioningly to my whims," John said; "I could not respect a wife who respected me too much. I could not love a woman whom I could neither admire

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nor respect. Our marriage is a partnership of two equals, not the pastime of a conceited child and a waxen doll."

The fruit of this creed was that, though they often differed, and bitterly at times, their war was a duel of two adversaries of mutual courtesy, and the result was acquiescence in a just arbitration, not the rankling smart that haunts the despot and his victim, cowed but not convinced.

The issue of such a life was that, where John fought against the obstinacies or the conspiracies of fate, he fought four-handed, double-minded, and with a strength and cunning that were both male and female. His wife's pride was kept alert, her responsibility alive. How could they help but succeed largely and soon?

Year upon year had passed over their heads, and though there was no gray in John's thick brown hair, the lines of his face were trenched deep, and about his smooth-shaven jaws there hung the strength of authority and resolution, which was softened into a certain quaint gentleness by the scar of the wound of Wilson's Creek, that left the dimple in one cheek and gave his every expression half a quizzing smile. It was a strong face, yet withal a genial, when the Presidential nomination dawned across his horizon at fifty years.

Time had left another trace upon Lucy, six years his junior. The records of anxiety and travail and grief that had shadowed her eyes and misted the bloom upon her cheek, seemed to have vanished forever when, after the illness following the death of a young son of all promise, she came forth with her

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hair snow-white. Now it seemed that Time, loving her dearly, had crowned her with a coronal of white roses and a benison of serene peace.

She had borne to John six children, sons four and daughters two; but the first child had died just after its first wail had thrust a barbed hook into the souls of the young father and mother. The other children had passed with all their various temperaments, their faults and fascinations, through the gauntlet of sicknesses and the hard school of unlearning native mischiefs and subduing natural appetites.

The year before the Republican nomination was offered to John, the eldest son had entered college, the other was studying for West Point, to be a soldier; the daughters were just blooming from short skirts into long petals and the little pink love-affairs of the early 'teens.

Then some of the threads of life humming through the loom snapped, and everything seemed to stop short in a woful tangle. The eldest son broke down from overstudy, and was brought back to Washington; in his weakness he fell easy prey to pneumonia and typhoid fever at once, and after a few weeks of fierce anxiety and desperate expedient, there was nothing to do but surrender him to the grave. Lucy, who had stood all of Time's other brutalities with lofty bravery, could not endure this shock resignedly. She was all embittered and distraught and madly frustrate at the loss of this third son from the treasury of her hopes and ambitions.

The only thing that enabled John to bear up under the crushing flail of destiny was the utter collapse of Lucy's strength. He seemed to clutch his heart in

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his fist to keep it from bleeding to death from its deep wound. At this crisis the health of Lucy's aged mother broke down, and Lucy must needs hurry west. Her father had died some years before. Now she took the children with her, and John, returning from the station to his empty home, gave up to his lonely grief, crying aloud in his agony like the father of Absalom wailing for his son, his son.

John's bleeding heart beat with so limping a strength that all his thoughts went awry. His private investments began to suffer from his erratic moods. His colleagues in the Senate found him as impossible as he found them irritating.

One morning he sat in his office thrumming his desk, and on the verge of a frenzy of restlessness. Lucy had been away for weeks and weeks. He had had no letter from her for the last three days; he could not know how excellent her reasons were, he could only fret at his loneliness. He had other letters a plenty: letters from complaining constituents, angry at his neglect to run their unreasonable errands; letters from agents reporting business losses, explaining why dividends could not be declared, and why assessments must be levied. He looked out of his window at a cold, soppy rain, and, though he was overdue at his committee-room, he could not find energy to rise and go.

His whole mood was one of despairing nausea, and life was ashes in his mouth; his heart was sodden and clammy with the chill and the rain, rain, rain.

The private secretary appeared with a card. John waved him away.

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"It's a lady, sir. Mrs. Lee Carteret, of Virginia."

"Don't know any such person. Can't see her. Tell her I'm out; tell her I'm sick — or dead — God knows I wish I were."

"Very well, sir." He moved to the door, then paused. "She says you used to know her as Miss Alabama Muir."

John amazed, murmured, "Show her in."

He held open the door himself, and into the wintry jail walked smiling April, with a perfume of violets and a witchery that conjured joy out of nothing. What could the chained and dejected prison do, but yearn toward the Spring?

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VIII.

MANY times it was necessary for Mrs. Carteret to call upon Senator Mead. Her husband, dying a year ago, had left her, as her chief heritage, a number of claims against the government for war-time confiscations. If she could only get these claims granted she would be almost rich for life. Many other people had done the same thing. All she needed was influence. She came to Washington, and took a little furnished house, and settled down for a long campaign.

The Senators from Virginia said regretfully that, being from the Solid South, they had a minus quantity of power over the administration. If Mrs. Carteret only had some Republican friends — "What of Senator Mead?" No one had more influence. If she could only bring some influence to bear upon him, it would be plain sailing.

"Ah wondeh if Ah still have any influence oveh the Senato'?" Alabama had pondered.

She sent him her card. She took him, in person, her smile. Her question was answered. The look upon John's face at the sight of Her Saccharinity was such a gaze as a drowning man might fasten on a girl who threw him a life-line.

Alabama's claim on the government was soon absolved under John's potent influence. Alabama's

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claims against John were not so easily and quickly ended.

Lucy's letters were hasty and brief, and written in snatches of sick-room leisure. John's letters to her were long and tender and full of news on almost every topic except one, the Carteret claim.

Washington is a city full of invitations to drive and to walk. John and Alabama accepted both. One day a man passed very close to John, and scowled darkly into his face.

John stopped. "That's the second time that man has jostled me in the last two days. If I see him again, I'll break him in two."

"No, foh heaven's sake, let him alone. That's po' Mark Lane," Alabama interceded.

"You know him, then? Who is he, and what?"

"Why, he comes of one of the best families in Virginia, grandson of one of the signehs of the Declaration of Independence. He was a majoh in the Confederate ahmy himself, and was ve'y seriously hurt in one of the fust battles — in that ve'y battle you made yo' fust fame in. He was in command of the left wing of Bradfo'd's Raiders when yo'-all defeated 'em so badly. He was slashed oveh the head with a sword, and one of yo' officehs must have dealt the blow. Mark was taken prisoneh, but was sent home to die. He got well, but he neveh has been quite right in his mind since — nothing dangerous, but just a little queeah. He used to love me befo' the wah, and Ah liked him pretty well. Ah was engaged to him — among othehs. Since mah husband, Captain Carteret, died, po' Mark has resumed his attentions, and fo' the sake of his

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heaht-broken family — such lovely people, too — Ah have to be ve'y kyind to him. He has followed me heah, and he has evidently taken a dislike to you. But Ah beg you not to notice him."

John thought with a shiver that it was he himself who had dealt Mark Lane that sabre-cut in the long ago. The evils of the war seemed never to end; each new thrust of the spade of Time seemed to turn up some new proof of its horror.

But soon in the lilt of Alabama's prattle, he forgot everything but her charm. She made a pretty widow, plump, riant, lyrical with zest of life. Her grief had apparently not touched her very deeply; nothing solemn ever did. Perhaps, though, it was to blame for the little tufts of gray at her temples, touches of white so becoming that John half suspected she had put them there studiously with her own powder-puff.

She still found John strangely attractive, though now she had a tiny awe of him. To him she was irresistible as the thrill of daybreak to the lonely East. So, almost imperceptibly, they resumed their old flirtation. But now — she was no longer a butterfly dancing on the breeze; he was no longer the man to kiss and ride away. A kiss meant to them both — helplessness to pause, to laugh and say Good-bye.

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IX.

ONE forenoon, as John sat at his desk, reading with heavy eyes his heavy mail, and making nothing of it, he pushed the sheaf away and gazed out of his window toward the west. He thought of Lucy in a way he had not thought of her for a week. The glamour that had seemed so all-sufficient, so beautiful a relief from his bitterness of heart, so justified by his solitude and despair — this glamour drifted away from his retrospect like a fog.

He had thought of Lucy almost with resentment, because even her mother's illness could call her from his side. Now he seemed to see her in a new light. Her great beauty of soul and body rose like a wraith of unrequited devotion against the western sky. He seemed to hear her weeping over her many sorrows, and groping for his hand, and nestling toward the shelter of his strong arm. So vivid was the fantasy that he bent forward to kiss her. Then he drew back, for upon his lips there was the smart of misspent kisses, and his lips trembled with their unworthiness of Lucy's sacred cheek.

Once more the secretary found him in an anguish of irresolution, not now with the ennui of afternoon restlessness, but with the morning business of

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remorse. Now the secretary proffered him, not a card, but a telegram.

John feared to touch it.

"Open it," he said, hoarsely.

The secretary glanced at it, and gave a start. He handed it to John, who read:

"My dear mother is dying. Please come at once.
"LUCY."

Shame and remorse had him pinioned on the long journey in the train. When he arrived, he was too late to do more than join the funeral party, and support Lucy while the clods clattered on the coffin, to caress her while she wept on his breast all the homeward way, and all the long night. When one nears fifty years, deaths are common things, but their frequence gives them only the more dismay, the lesser solace.

The next morning there were many letters for Lucy — letters of condolence from friends of all sorts, crested sheets from notable men and women of Washington society, carefully ruled and laboriously irregular lines from farm-people. There were letters from soldiers she had nursed to life twenty years since, and messages from soldiers' widows whose names she had forgotten, but who still cherished in the family Bibles the words she had sent them with such gentle telling of bad news.

As Lucy and John read them over, they sat on the same old horsehair sofa that had been the chapel of her marriage. John's arm was round her, and her hair was against his cheek.

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At length she came to a letter postmarked Washington.

"Whose handwriting is this, I wonder?" said Lucy. "I don't know it."

"I never saw it before, either," said John. "Perhaps if you'd open it, you'd learn."

She smiled sadly, filliped his cheek, and kissed him. Then she tore open the envelope. She read: "Dear madam," then searched its closely written pages till she found the signature.

"It's from somebody named Mark Lane," she said. "Who's he, I wonder?"

John's heart stopped, and the hand on Lucy's cheek turned ice-cold. He longed to snatch the letter away, but could not budge a finger.

Lucy read aloud:

"DEAR MADAM: — A thousand apologies for this letter! Only a sense of strict duty to you, as well as to myself and to society, could force me to write it. Certain suspicious appearances have led me for the past two weeks to keep a close watch on all the actions of your husband, Senator John Mead. For some time you have been away from Washington. For two weeks the widow of Captain Lee Carteret, C. S. A., has been in the city concerning certain claims. Mrs. Carteret and your husband are old friends — "

Lucy's voice stuck in her throat. She read on silently, sitting erect to escape John's arm, lying along the back of the sofa. As her trembling hand turned the leaves, it seemed to John that they crackled

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like volleys of lead. He could not look at the letter; he could not stir from his place. He simply sat still and waited for the knell of his doom.

Lucy read on to the bitter dregs of the letter:

"Should you care to make use of this information, to release yourself from the bonds that fasten you to this man, I have other witnesses besides myself, and beg to be believed,

"Your obedient servant,

"MARK LANE, *ex-Major, C. S. A.*"

Lucy sat still a long moment, then she folded the letter slowly and rose. Towering splendidly above him, she said to John, in a taut voice:

"Have you read this letter?"

John shook his head without looking at her.

"Do you know what it contains?"

John nodded yes.

"Do you deny the truth of its charges?"

John shook his head.

"My mother's death leaves me money enough to provide for the children. My grief for her loss leaves my heart too weak and too tired to suffer much from this — this other death that has come to it. Will you please go now?"

John rose and turned toward her, eyes full of appeal for mercy. They looked upon a face of Parian stone, all firmness and pallor. He knew that look. He bowed and moved to the door. She spoke again:

"When you get back to Washington, will you be

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kind enough to send me my things, and the keepsakes of the — the dead boys? It will be the last favour I shall trouble you with."

He nodded his promise and passed out, closing the door behind him as upon a chamber of death.

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X.

LUCY, left alone, faced the result of her decision with such self-consuming, such Roman fortitude as Brutus showed, condemning his own sons to die. She was helpless to overlook or condone the perfidy that had been revealed at so ill-chosen a moment, not because of the mood of that hour, or because the sin was against her. She was not one of those whose whole sense of justice swings on the pivot of self, easily forgiving radical crimes that are foreign to their interests, unable to be judicial to the least degree in any least injury that comes home.

Lucy knew that her mood did not colour her verdict, nor did her selfishness. The relentlessness she felt taking root in her heart was of oak, and it was due not to the fact that the crime was against her pride, but because it was against her trust; not because her husband had bruised her love, but because he had set a brand on his own forehead.

As for John, knowing Lucy as he did, perfectly understanding as he did her creeds and the un-passionate, un-egoistic judgment she would render and hold to, he wasted no time in harrowing her further. He went to the scaffold on the horizon of his future with calm despair. He felt so deeply that his fate was just, that he could not resist it. He could only try to be brave.

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As he passed out of the Darr homestead, he found his children seated on the piazza, trying hard to coerce their young animal spirits to the dignity proper to the scene of the recent funeral. They rushed to their father, but they did not find the smile, the joke, the playfulness that had almost always brightened his face at their approach. He kissed them many times, hugged them till they were fain to cry out with suffocation, and told them "good-bye" with a hoarse voice and a broken-heartedness that left them staring after him in awe.

John had bought and deeded to his mother, when prosperity first gave him a hand, a new and comfortable house in Darrville. But now something urged him to go back to the older scenes of his childhood. If he could only be a child again, and cry upon his mother's breast again, he might not smother as it seemed he would. But all the trees that he passed seemed to be cypresses and weeping willows, and the little home that had offered to his young eyes so rich a shelter from the outer world was now only a strangely bleak and ugly hut. There were strange people living there, too, poor and unlucky wretches; and he saw with a great shock, a tumbling humiliation, that these shiftless paupers were such folk as his people had been; that their squalor had been his; that the barefooted, gawky boy dawdling about the littered yard was himself, years past. The levelling work this picture did in his bitter heart, did not bring these paupers up to the high plateau his democracy had been wont to dwell upon; it only brought him down to the weedy moor where they seemed to batten. Democracy, in that mood of his,

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had not the stout and towering stalk of the sunflower; it was rusty, smarting, useless dog-fennel.

He turned away from the ugly hovel and plunged into the woods. They, at least, must be broad and stately, for they were not of sordid mankind, but of nature's own poesy.

Here again disillusion outran him. The forest, that had seemed as wide as the greenwood of Robin Hood, was only a thicket, seedy, cattle-tracked, and soggy. The birds did not sing in tune, they only quarrelled and haggled and squawked. A sharp-voiced robin in a tarnished waistcoat caught his eye, and sent his memory back to the epic day when he sought and found that red will-o'-the-wisp, the Virginia Nightingale. But to-day he felt that it had been only a marsh-light that led him into the swamp of public strife; the education it had begun for him had taught him too much. He was the blind wise man who, not realising his own good fortune, had jumped into the brambles and had his eyes scratched open again to the sorrows, the cheapness of the world. He felt that he was all beset with briars.

The word, "Virginia Nightingale," took his thought to that other flitting lyrical creature from Virginia, who had lured him so deeply into the tragedy of life. He cursed her very name, and found a little comfort in casting the fault on her pink shoulders. Then this solace also left him, and his burden fell back upon him with added weight, for he saw that even as his ambition had killed the little bird that had wandered north to its death, so his blind infatuation had hushed the cheery song of Alabama June Muir, and had turned her sweet

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mischief into sin, never to be undone. On that far-off day in these woods his blood had mingled with the blood on the breast of the Virginia Nightingale. On this day he saw with all remorse that the heart's-blood of that pretty girl had flowed with his own from the wounds of desire.

Again, as on that boyhood day, it was his mother's bosom that offered him the only haven, the only balm. She alone could look upon him with eyes that carried no reproach, but were still lustrous with belief, with perfect understanding, and with love indissoluble.

To her he turned, and though fifty years were on his head, and she had reached her three-score and ten, they were again child and mother. On his face and in his kiss she felt the bitterness of lonely sorrow, and she gave him love that was like a cradle, unquestioning, soothing, downy with warmth and assuagement.

After a silence, he said:

"Mother, Lucy is not going back home with me — ever. Will you come?"

"Oh, you mustn't fret over a little rift like this, my boy. You've had less than your share. Your life has been too happy. I knew trouble must be waiting for my boy somewheres along the road. But it's only like a patch of mist you sometimes find between the hills. If you want me to walk through it with you, why, I'll be terrible glad to. But you'll come out into the sunlight again, and there you'll find Lucy."

John did not share his mother's hope. She went to Washington with him that night, and she was

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all that a mother could be to his home. But his soul was mad for his wife and for his children. The quiet evenings had the hush of a prison underground, where the drip-drip of water is the only music, and threatens madness.

The American heart, foreign people say, lacks reverence and seriousness, since laughter and ridicule are always near by. But sometimes our laughter is as the bitter fool that dogged the steps of King Lear, trying to keep sane the mind that grief is shoving toward the cliffs of despair. This elbow-companion of wit had always helped John through the darkest nights of his life, but now it seemed to have deserted him utterly. He could find no cheer within his heart.

At last he sought it outside. He stole away from home, under cover of various excuses, to other scenes where at least there was brightness with laughter and excitement. Dissipation did not end his loneliness nor his remorse, but it broke the black monopoly that was suffocating him.

The great, snooping detective-bureau of Gossip had somehow not yet fastened on the beautiful quarrel between Senator Mead and his wife. Lucy was supposed to be stopping at her old home because the country air was good for the children, and because no one who could get away stayed in Washington during the summer. John's recreations were conducted with all discretion, and even the gambling he became addicted to was in the sanctuary of his clubs, where gambling was too common to gain notice.

From Alabama all the veil of charm seemed to

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have fallen away in John's thought. He saw her with reluctance, and only when his sense of her loneliness, and of the evil he had brought on her, overcame every other contesting claim upon his tangled conscience.

This last thought seemed to weigh upon Lucy, too. And Mark Lane, though with all a maniac's cunning he kept from the sight of either Alabama or John, still spied upon them, and plied Lucy with news.

One day a letter came from Lucy. The sight of her handwriting, for the first time in so many weeks, was a knife in John's old wound. Under it the hope that he had thought quite dead winced and twisted in pain.

Lucy's letter ran thus:

"DEAR JOHN: — I have been thinking things over from a new point of view recently. It has come to me that the children and I are not the only ones whom you have wronged. As I remember Alabama Carteret, she was a girl of altogether good heart, but very lightly hinged on impulse. Her chief weakness was the vanity that is always hungry for and must have admiration and attention at any cost. For this she seems to me now, in my calmer meditation, no more to blame than for the colour of her eyes. I have at last found the strength, and, I solemnly believe, the wisdom, to see that you have wronged her even more deeply than you wronged me, because you made her a sharer in a sin that casts on me only its shadow, not its stain.

"For a long time I felt that for the sake of our

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children, I would take no public step, but I have since come to see that our separation cannot much longer remain a secret, and that there can be no appreciable difference in the result to them between a public estrangement and a definite separation.

"When I think of the wrong that is being done the unfortunate woman, whose weakness you have turned to such disaster, there remains no sufficient reason to hesitate longer, but every reason to act without delay. I have therefore decided to ask the courts for a divorce from you. The evidence I have is such that, as my lawyer says, unless you contest it, the public need know nothing except the simple fact that we are divorced.

"I am not so blinded with my disappointment in you that I cease to remember the noble qualities that made me love you so deeply and so long. In the knowledge of those qualities, I feel sure that you will not contest this case, but will aid it as you can with your knowledge of the law, and that as soon as you are free, you will hasten to marry Mrs. Carteret, and make her as much reparation as you can.

"As my resolve has been carefully and prayerfully reached, I beg you not to think of trying to shake it. It means for all of us a future that is next to the best that could have been.

"The children are all well. They miss you greatly, but do not, of course, yet know anything of the real cause of your absence. With every good wish for your continued success and your future happiness, I remain,

"Faithful to the right as best I can see it,

"LUCY."

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This letter brought upon John a deep mental stupor that lasted for days. In the first depth of it came the visit of the committee offering him the Presidential nomination.

When a little of the fog was withdrawn from his brain, John told everything to his political shepherd, old Judge Orme.

"Oh, ho!" he laughed, "I'll soon talk her out of that. No woman could resist the chance of being the 'First Lady of the Land.'"

"You don't know Lucy," John said.

"Well, then, the thought that she is ruining your ambition utterly will touch her big, noble heart," persisted Judge Orme.

"The thought of what I owe to Mrs. Carteret will outweigh any other consideration," John answered. "Her rule has always been, 'Honour always; success if possible with honour.'"

"I'll take the first train, and go see her myself," said Judge Orme.

In a few days he returned from the West, with defeat dark on his countenance.

"I told you so," was all John's consolation.

"She is as immovable as the Sphinx," Orme groaned. "When she heard about the nomination, she said she hoped you would win. She also hoped that the public would see that at best its President was only a man, and that it would respect him for patching up his mistakes as best he could. If it didn't, still your duty was plain, whether you were President or pauper. She paid no more heed to my talk than as if she were the Sphinx. My boy, we are ruined."

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XI.

AUSTERITY for austerity's sake was not Lucy's motto. Her chief instinct was always toward gentleness and mercy. She could endure unflinchingly any torture that purchased some one else a comfort. To torment another for her own comfort's sake, rendered that comfort misery. She had that ultimate ideal of humanity, far-sighted altruism.

In her attitude toward John, the affront that had been put on herself was almost the last thing she thought of. First, her heart cried aloud at the heel that trod upon it; then she felt chiefly a great pity and anxiety for the man who was so unfortunate, so pitifully careless, as to tread upon a heart lying at his feet.

She thought of Judge Orme as an oily schemer, whose nearest approach to patriotism was partiotism. When he called on her, he wreaked on her all the rhetorical technic he had learned in wheedling, or awing, or overwhelming, sheepish juries in their folds. Lucy heard him out with all the hospitality she could command, but her thought was not on his eloquence; she was simply wondering how long her courtesy could restrain her impatience. Orme had learned to feel that vague, chill hostility and weariness, that sometimes rises

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against a lawyer or an actor from a jury or an audience; and it froze his oratory now. He pulled out the tremolo stop, but it had so bleating an effect that he hastily pushed it back again. So it was with all his stops: they all sounded like mechanism. Lucy was as dead to his magnetism as the silver churn of the song, and at length he retired — simply faded away in baffled chagrin.

A few days later a new suppliant arrived in Darrville. It was John's mother, who had hurried west the moment she learned of Judge Orme's failure. When her name was brought to Lucy, she trembled, for she felt that a siege was to be made against an unfortified city in her heart, the beautiful city of mercy.

She went into the drawing-room, and found Mrs. Mead seated on the old sofa, and almost torn in pieces by the caresses of the grandchildren, who idolised her. Lucy bent over her, and kissed both of her much-wrinkled cheeks.

Mrs. Mead said to the youngsters:

"There's a large box in the hall, that your father sent you, and it has a few little knick-knacks from me. Take it up-stairs, dearies, and open it."

With a stampede as of colts, the children left the room. Lucy sank into a chair, and the two women, who had been so devoted and congenial, sat silent in mutual fear. It was only the clock that talked, and its chatter fretted the nerves of both.

Finally Lucy turned her gaze toward Mrs. Mead, and when she looked into the ancient tenderness of those eyes, her own eyes fell, though they had

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stared Judge Orme out of countenance and eloquence. It was still some while before Mrs. Mead could speak; then she said, in very motherly tones:

"Lucy, you and me used to have our only little spats over disciplining your children. And you used to say that folks who had been stricter than anything with their own young-uns was always spoiling their grandchildern with too much kindness. And I always said — didn't I? — that it wa'n't because old folks was weak, but because a body had to live a long time to learn how much more work you can do with gentleness than with bein' severe. You can lead a human being a sight farther with a kind hand than you can drive him with a whip. You was always the kind-heartedest of mothers, Lucy, and we didn't often quarrel, did we? And you was always doin' what you thought was best for your little-uns, however much it hurt you. And I know you're doin' what you're doin' now as much for John's sake as for your own.

"But, I tell you, Lucy, it ain't for you to lay the whip on John — or, if it was, you've punished him enough. When you used to punish your little chicks, you used to always kiss 'em and cry over 'em, and that did more good than any amount o' discipline. You didn't disown 'em, did you, or drive 'em away when they did wrong? No, you hugged 'em closer, and mothered 'em. You've given John all the punishment that's good for him, Lucy. It's time to take him back into your arms.

"All these years, Lucy, I used to thank God every night that you, and no other woman on earth, married John. But fer the last few weeks, somehow,

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I ha'n't been able to say that prayer. I ha'n't been able to say my prayers at all, Lucy; only to cry myself to sleep night after night."

She wept now, with the feeble, tired sobs of old age. And Lucy could not help going to her, and placing her hand on the grief-shaken shoulder, and clasping one of the trembling hands. Mrs. Mead dashed away the tears and turned toward Lucy, saying:

"Lucy, you're a'most as much my daughter as John is my son. You two air my childern. I think I love you a'most as much as I love him. I have brought my weary old bones all this long journey to plead with you not to break your own heart, for I know it is breaking — and not to break my boy's heart. I won't speak of my own, because it don't matter; it hasn't got much longer to ache anyway, — and it's be'n used to aching. But it would be so terrible to go into my grave and leave everything all wrong with you two — you two childern.

"Lucy, you — you can't send me to my grave like that! I know you can't. And it will kill my boy, too. He's climbed and climbed up the terrible mountain all these years, and you've helped him and bound up his bruises; and he's always turned to you — not only in his trouble, but in his success, too. And when anybody said, 'John, you're gettin' along wonderful;' he'd always say, 'It's all due to the wife. Lucy's to blame for any success I've had' — didn't he always say that? And he meant it, and he was always so tender to you; and when you was sick and going to die and he come home from the war, didn't he sacrifice everything to — But I don't have

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to tell you the love he's showed to you; your own heart is full of it, I know.

"Lucy, I know you love him almost more'n ever. I know you think you're doin' the right by him and that other woman. But you're only going to ruin all three of you. If you go back to John nobody will know there was ever a difference. If you don't, you'll bring everlasting shame on him and on that woman. If John should marry her, as you want him to, it wouldn't help any. It would only drive them both into disgrace before the world and into misery at home. For John doesn't love her; he never did. It was only a man's insanity for a pretty face and a fetchin' smile when a beautiful face and a sweeter smile ain't near to keep him true. And your childern will always bear the reproach you're a-goin' to bring on their innocent little lives.

"And there's my child, my boy that I've nursed and tended and watched and hoped for so many a long year. He's up a'most to the top of the great big mountain of success. One step more and all his gifts and his honesty and his bruises and heart-aches and his hard days and his sleepless nights and his dreams will find the greatest reward an American can win. And now he stops and sees that, instead of bein' able to take that step, there's a hand on his arm that is draggin' him back, and — that hand has the power to throw him down the terrible cliff. And the whole world, that was watchin' to see how he had climbed from the very foot of the mountain, will see him lying there again all covered with shame, and crushed and killed — for it will kill him, Lucy. And as he waits there, wonderin' what

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will be his fate, he turns to see what hand it is that is draggin' him back to his ruin, and he sees — no enemy, no rival, not even the black hand of bad luck, but the little hand of Lucy Darr, the little hand that he's be'n holdin' in his all these years, the hand he's kissed so often, the hand that was always so sweet and gentle when his head was a-burnin' up with fever and pain.

"And the childern — think of them, Lucy; they love their father so much. You can't break up their home. And he loves them so dear. He's almost dead he's so lonely for his chicks. And he loves you, Lucy. He's never loved anybody else since he was a little ragged boy. And you was so good to him always. You can't murder him and all his hope after all these years. Lucy, you can't ruin my boy's life. You must forgive him! You've just got to come back to him!"

Then the two women wrapped their arms about each other, and seemed to indulge in a weeping-match.

And the first thing John knew, he had a telegram, so full of importance that it took twelve words.

"Get the house ready. Lucy and the children leave for home to-night."

When John grew calm enough to face his fellow men, he ran out and bought up the entire stock of the nearest florist.

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XII.

WHEN John flung his arms about his wife at the station, she kissed him before all the crowd. In the carriage he managed to cling to one of her hands, though he was lost under a heap of devouring and clambering children. The family reached the house just in time for dinner. John carved, and he said:

"For the sake of appropriateness, Lucy, the roast to-night is veal — fatted veal. But the — it's the prodigal who's doing the entertaining."

He was in such hilarious spirits that Lucy could not be entirely cheerless. And John rejoiced as never before. He knew what home meant as never before in his home-loving life.

After dinner, the children showed such fatigue from the long railroad travel, and the excitement of the reunion, that John and Lucy kissed them all soundly and sent them to bed.

Then said John: "As they say in the play, 'At last we are alone!'"

He seated himself upon the arm of the great chair that had been for many a year the throne of their love.

But Lucy, with a sigh, put away his arms, and rose.

"John," she said, "I have to say the hardest thing I ever said in my life. Your mother per-

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suaded me that I ought not to hinder your ambitions, and persuaded me to live with you again. But it is all for your sake and the children's. I consent to be your wife before the world and before our family. I can be a hypocrite that far. But, John, I cannot be a hypocrite to you. You have killed all that part of my love. My heart is yours in spite of itself, but it has turned to ice — it has turned to ice."

John sank down with a groan of final despair, and clenched his eyes in anguish. When he opened them again she had stolen away.

He sat through hours of bitterest meditation, then rose in frantic protest and hurried up to Lucy's room. But the key was turned, and when he knocked and when he called to her softly, there was no answer. He stumbled away to his own room, midnight thick upon his soul.

Many of his resolutions in that sleepless night of ferocious reflection were for refusing to accept Lucy's sacrifice; now out of wild resentment toward her; now out of unwillingness to drag her as a prisoner at the wheels of his triumphal chariot. But in the gray, cold, steely morning, his ambition dawned as cold and gray, and he determined to find what solace he could in success.

That fall there were elections in various States, and the success of the Republicans in this campaign would mean much in the Presidential election a year later. John had no office-hunt to make, but the party needed him, and his committee of supporters wanted him to show what was in him. So he was deluged with invitations to speak. He flung

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himself into the campaign with single-hearted relentlessness toward himself, his supporters, and his adversaries. He travelled the country far and wide, preparing speeches all night, and delivering them all day. People wondered when he slept, if at all. They wondered that his right hand was not shaken off by the endless throngs. They wondered if his unwearying throat were only a silver trumpet, and his brain a tireless machine.

But his heart had turned itself into a partner of his mind and ambition, and his voice rang out in great auditoriums, or from open-air pulpits, or from the rear platform of his special train; and wherever his words were sown, votes sprang up in exuberant harvest.

Now, the vast people of the United States began to rally to John Mead as a national figure, as the beloved son of their own life and thought. His Idea was theirs. And the rich, whether they had inherited their money from proud lineages, or had built it up from lowliness, knew that John was no enemy of that wealth which, like the force of gravity, draws the crowded, warring atoms of mankind together, and keeps the world whirling in and to the sunlight. Even the Solid South remembered that after his sword was sheathed, his voice had been unleashed for Southern weal.

With this combination of trust and admiration working for him, John's fame grew; as a candidate and a successful candidate he began to look inevitable and overwhelming.

Everywhere in the States where the Republicans had had a chance at all, they swept the elections.

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Many a doubtful place was triumphantly taken, many a citadel of Democratic pride was crumbled. A lion's share of the credit was given to John Mead.

Bonfires all over the United States set the astronomers on Mars to answering what they supposed to be an elaborate series of signals. So John's triumph lighted up at least two planets. Which was doing fairly well, when you look back through the dust-cloud of years, and remember him a little barefoot, stealing a ride toward his parental log cabin at the ragged edge of civilisation.

John's glowing fame brought also a thrill of pride, though no confessions of it, from a pretty Virginia widow, exiled in a small and obscure town, where she was receiving proposals every few days from all the prominent old bachelors and widowers in the region.

One of her lovers, the unfortunate Mark Lane, had suffered acute misery when he learned that Lucy had returned to Washington. He had watched the campaign in increasing frenzy, and the reiteration of John's picture and name in all the journals of the land finally drove him so mad that it took several men to restrain him and conduct him to the violent ward of an asylum.

This knowledge was mercifully spared to John in his hour of pride. He had gone back to his native State to vote, and make a final speech that had swung an unpopular candidate into the gubernatorial saddle. When the last politician had left his mother's house in Darrville, and even the last mob blaring its horns outside had demanded John's

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presence at the window, a new day sprinkled roses and lighted bonfires along the November horizon.

The children had drifted off to bed, unable to do more than whisper good night from throats husky with cheering. Old Mrs. Mead had cried herself to sleep in her chair, and John kissed her peaceful brow with all reverence.

Then he turned to Lucy, who stood at the window looking through the curtains at the rapturous eastern sky.

"Have you nothing to say, Lucy?"

She turned to him, and said:

"I have prayed for this, and my prayers are answered. I am very proud of the success you have so much deserved. I — I congratulate you, John."

And she gave him her hand. He took it, and moved closer, but in her eyes there was a look that pushed him back. He laughed bitterly:

"Congratulations from you! You and I shaking hands!"

But she only sighed and left him. He flung back the curtain, and breathed in the air. It was morning air, cool and bracing, but the romance of night was from it. He looked at the sky. The sun was established there, huge and golden and dazzling. But the roses were gone.

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XIII.

NOW that John stood before the country as the most prominent Republican candidate, and the surest-seeming, he found himself vastly and variously popular. His visitors changed from a many to a multitude. Schemes unlimited for making votes and ensuring success were brought to him from everywhere. Some said nothing of rewards, hoping to compel them afterward. Others offered openly to barter influence for consulships, postmasterships, and all grades of office, from porter to member of the Cabinet.

"Seems to me," John wrote to Elkanah Tew, "as if every man, woman, and child were, by his, her, or its sole efforts, going to put me in office, and it's only natural that each solitary sandpiper should want a cozy little nest. As there are about ten thousand sandpipers to every nest, they'd have to sit pretty snug if I let 'em all in. But as the law allows only one sitter for each nest, you can see that my life consists chiefly of cancellation. If I'm ever elected, I'll instantly drop from being the most popular, to being the most unpopular man in the country, and every man's voice will be against me."

It was ghastly work, seeing people in with a smile and out with a sigh, when in truth the opposite was his mood. It began to abrade John's nerves.

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It was as if Noah, with one eye on the gathering clouds and another on the unbattened hatches of his ferry, had been compelled to be affable and intimate with each member of the endless chain of animals, and to explain tenderly to each fond couple why it could not be given the bridal stateroom.

John found his only escape from downright melancholia in romping with his children. Lucy's effort to aid him with her smile, and with every show of hearty friendliness, only embittered the famine he suffered, because her smiles never proffered a kiss, her friendliness was only that and nothing more.

When they returned to Washington after the campaign, he felt all jaded and disappointed even with his first taste of national success. But now, returning after his absence, he looked with new eyes upon the Capitol, when his carriage crossed a street that disclosed it clear and suddenly. At sight of it, John's heart could not but beat a little faster.

By some miracle in that period of architectural crudity in America, this Capitol was an achievement. With its vast dome and its outspread wings, it is a noble, beautiful temple; set aloft upon the high hill that it crowns, and representing as it does the religion of government for the people, of the people, and by the people, it becomes the most impressive building in all this world.

Many a visitor to Washington weeps when he first beholds it, and trembles before the great thought it enunciates with eloquent sonority.

The Capitol was a familiar sight to John, but to-day it summoned his soul aloft, as if it were

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a great white symphony of human hopes and aspirations and of human justice fixed on the firm ground, but that ground a high hill, and with its whole effort and thrust upward and outward. When John saw it to-day, there was a flash of mist to his eyes, and he thought of the solemn inaugural oath he would one day take before that Capitol, if all the omens were not false. At this very moment the mood swept over him to take an oath to his own heart that he should hold himself consecrated to the service of his people, made holy to its needs, its better desires, its manifold well-being.

His mother seemed to feel the same prophecy, for she leaned over to him, and said:

"John, boy, back in th' old days when I used to be bendin' over the tub, and you played round or helped me in your little way, I used to straighten up and look 'way off into the future, and I seemed to see you just as I seem to see you to-day, ridin' to the Capitol in the kerridge with the old President, and ridin' away again as the new President. I s'pose every American mother has dreams like that, but my boy is going to bring mine true!"

But John had already blackslidden from his exaltation; he only sighed to his mother:

"It's a good thing, Mother, that somebody's dreams come true once in awhile — 'for to encourage the others.' But the man whose dreams come true — well, he's pretty sure not to notice it, but to go on dreaming some other dream that would be dearer to him."

This was the burden of John's life. His success was absolute but for one thing, the old partnership

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of his old comrade in love. Lacking this, the Presidency would be as nothing; the honours it would bring him from the great men of the nation; the courtesies from foreign ministers as to an heir apparent, all these things would be mockeries like tinsel on a broken-hearted clown. His affection for Lucy deepened to a mute worship. He worshipped her with that unquestioning idolatry that sees sorrow and tragedy everywhere, and yet says that its idol can do no wrong. He grew to feel that Lucy's attitude toward him had a divine abnegation, and he tried to copy it, and to see that nothing he might do or say should harrow her more than he saw she was already anguished by the living corpse of her old affection for him.

As for Lucy, the struggle to be dutiful and tender, and to give her heart back to John as far as she could, was eating her life out. She would fain have forgiven, forgotten all the blighting, freezing, trampling effects of that knowledge of his untruth to her devotion. But she could not.

Christmas came, and though the children romped in the ancient spirit of Christmas children, John and Lucy could only think of the sons that had laughed, and now were dead, of the love that had rejoiced, and now only writhed. And when John lifted his voice against his fate and her relentlessness, Lucy cried aloud to him from the depths:

"If I were God, and could give life to the dead, I would make my love for you bloom again. But I cannot. I am only a woman, and my heart is like a flower that has been plucked and flung down and trodden underfoot. I cannot make it red again.

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I cannot smooth it out and make it breathe again. It is not the flower's fault that it is crushed. Perhaps the one who crushed it meant no harm. But the flower is dead and dead for ever. I am helpless. I do all I can, all that I can."

John found some little nepenthe in the eternal oppression of his official duties, and Lucy turned to charitable work as a supplement to the care of her children and the hollow ceremonials that pillory the wife of a prominent statesman in Washington.

Old friends of her youth and of her less prominent days, calling on Lucy, often went away to say that her success had turned her head; that she was cold to them. But she was helpless here as toward John. The sight of former acquaintances brought back her young dreams, her earlier blisses, with a vividness that blinded her. If she had not received her old friends with all the reserve and self-restraint she could muster, she would have broken down before them, and confessed her whole sorrow.

It is a necessity and a relief for some people to pour out their secret woe, even to the ears of gossip, but Lucy was the wife of the "next President;" and she was John's wife; and she was Lucy. She was what she was.

One day she said to John that she would be grateful to him if he would lay the corner-stone of a large orphan asylum, for which she had raised most of the funds among the women of her acquaintance.

"It would help further subscriptions if you would preside," she said, "and would please the ladies of the committee."

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"Would it give you any pleasure?" John asked.

"Much pleasure."

"Then it will give me great pleasure," he said, with a gallant bow.

The engagement was crowded out of his memory by many a care, and he forgot it entirely till, one morning at breakfast, Lucy reminded him that this was the day, and the hour was not far off.

John concealed from her the fact that he had not thought out a word of his speech, and that he had made an appointment with a powerful political satrap he was eager to conciliate. The engagement with the satrap he diplomatically broke. The speech he tried to conjure as they drove out to the scene. But not a word could he think of.

The place was reached, a canopied stand was ready, and a great crowd of people swarmed round like a buzzing tide. Still he was without a subject.

During the preliminary ceremonies he gave a start and a clutch as if a gnat had stung him. The gnat was the theme of his speech, and he smiled as his mind pursued it. When he rose, it was with the light of enthusiasm lambent on his face. All eyes were fixed on him with affectionate expectation.

No one looked at or heeded the person next to him.

Nobody noted the wild look on the face of a certain man who had just joined the crowd. It was Mark Lane. He had escaped from the asylum the day before, after mangling his keeper. With the success that often follows singleness of purpose, even if there be no other intelligence beside it, he had evaded all pursuit, and found his way to Wash-

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ington this very morning. He had learned of John's engagement to speak. Here he was. He began to worm his way through the crowd to the front; a word of apology here, an adroit insinuation there, caused only a little grumbling and no special notice.

John's first words were humourous *hors-d'œuvre* that tickled the palates and whetted the zest of the crowd. Then the look on his face modulated from one of solemn humour to one of glad solemnity. He said:

"A galaxy of American mothers have, in their own purses and in their larger hearts, found the means and the stimulus to raise this building, whose corner-stone we are here to set in place with fitting ceremony. The occasion honours us more than we can hope to honour it. For this building is to be a haven for such luckless little people as misfortune has disadvantaged of the ineffable boon of being reared by American matrons. It is the aim of this place to mother them, and give them a home where some of them may learn to be what they have not been given; for it is our hope and our trust that each wee girl of those who shall be garnered in here, may grow to be that last word in womanhood, the ideal American wife and mother; that the boys may all become hard-working, high-hoping men, counting no ambition out of reach, no work so lowly that it may not be dignified with energy, no tool so good that it may not be improved, no condition so lofty that it may not be bettered — typical American men, fired by that self-respect which is always looking forward with resolve, and never backward with contentment or egotism, bowing down to no-

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body, counting nobody their betters, and fearing nobody on earth — excepting, always, of course, their wives and children."

People looked at each other, and grinned sympathetically. In the little flurry, Mark Lane edged well to the middle of the crowd. John went on, with more earnestness:

"To-day and here we are founding a little republic that shall offer shelter and equality and encouragement to the homeless, the nameless, those whom chance has shackled or loaded more heavily than others, and that at the very start of the race for happiness, for success.

"These good women are indeed doing, in a smaller way, the same great work our forefathers did when they laid the corner-stone of the vast structure of this republic in the little village of Lexington; and when they built the walls of it with suffering that persevered, with defeat that was not final, and with victory that brought no pause; and best of all, when they spread across those walls the high-arched roof and the soaring dome of that Declaration, which, let us not forget, was a Declaration of Independence, and also — nay, therefore — a Declaration of Equality."

The people closer to the platform were packed so thick that Mark Lane had much trouble squeezing through. Lucy, seated on the platform near John, and looking round the faces of the crowd, was revelling in the general love of her husband beaming on every mien, as John's voice rang on:

"Other people look up to kings, and sultans, and mikados, and what not? — and call them Father —

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call them Father in spite of their unfitness, their selfishness, the smallness of even the largest single mind. But we call no man master, and make no man the despot of our destinies, the arbiter of our ambitions. Any man among us may by hard work, or by the many links of circumstance, reach the highest office our country permits to exist. But when he reaches that place, there are still no citizens so feebly humble, so weak-spirited, as to call that man their emperor, or to think of him as anything but a fellow citizen who has found himself in the post of a servant of their will, a tool of their hand, and a creature of their approval."

The persistent motion of Mark Lane in the dense mass caught Lucy's eye. She noted with amazement that his look was not of the same general expression as the crowd's face. But John's words took her mind:

"The tiny citizens of this orphan home are to have no father, as we children of a larger republic have no father. And, in a sense, they are fortunate, as we are fortunate. For no one mind shall impose its narrow will upon them, as no one mind shall impose its shallow creeds and whims upon us.

"I promise you, fellow citizens, that the children of this home shall not be unlucky; and that great thinkers, and workers, and warm-hearted lovers of their kind and of their country, shall go forth from these walls. As they have no kith or kin but one another, so they shall be the broader-sympathied. And so we, gathered in this West of ours, must forget that we have come from England, Germany, or Ireland, or France, or Italy, and we must take our

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chief pride in being orphans mothered and fathered by that greatest of all refuges, — our Republic. And we must all strive together, one heart, one mind, one tongue, one kindred, one desire — and that, American!"

Lucy's eyes reverted to the crowd. She hunted out that one scowl, that one malevolence in the many-headed approval. With a little uneasiness, she found Mark Lane's wild eyes almost at the front of all the eyes. But still the Voice:

"In the homes that have reared us, our fathers and our mothers have loved their children all alike, and hoped for each of them the best. So let this orphan home glow as a fireplace, as a parent's heart, with undiscriminating love, and without stint of encouragement.

"Or, if there must be some partiality here, as, being a human thing, there cannot help but be, may that overplus of tenderness be here, as in a mother's heart, turned toward such children as have been born a little less strong, a little less dowered with advantages. Let us not make the mistake that left Sparta barren and unprogressive and ugly; let us not scorn or neglect our weaklings. For from such, there often rise the great thinkers, the inspired dreamers, the poets who will sing the toilers to their work, and the soldiers to their wars, and braid for their temples the wreathed bays of poesy. And so may it be with our republic, that it shall never cease to be a vast orphan-home, a great, brooding foster-mother. May it never forget to err in thoughtfulness always toward the weak, the op-

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pressed, the poor, always toward those who have no other help, no other hope.

"If I were choosing my dying words to my country, I should remember that she has given to me, her lowliest-born, her unworthiest and least perfect son, the sky, the air, and the great highway of freedom and of equality; and I should thank with my last thought the builders of this republic, and leave as my final behest —" Lucy, with a sudden dread reached out to catch John by the arm, but he was too fiercely absorbed in his theme to feel her hand on his sleeve.

"— As my final behest, I should leave a prayer that America should never, never, never efface from its keystone those first words that gave it being, and, while they gleam aloft, will give it justice and glory eternal:

"'All men are created free and equal —'"

A shot, a woman's cry, a swaying form — panic!

The hundreds of eyes sealed on the Senator's tall, gaunt figure, and his hand flung aloft like a flame, were of a sudden astounded to see his wife leap to her feet and throw her arms about him. Then the shot snapped the silence. Following it, like a ghostly echo, came the shrill scream of horror. Between Lucy's very fingers, a bullet cut just beneath John's heart.

The Senator's high-reaching right hand dropped. His left hand clutched his side. He collapsed like a tower of cards; twisting against the railing. He would have pitched over headlong into the crowd, had Lucy not clung to him.

Even as she held him fast, her eyes looked down

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upon Mark Lane, who levelled his smoking revolver again at John, and laughed as he shot. The bullet thudded to its goal, but Lucy seemed to feel the agony in her own heart. Just as a hand from the palsied crowd grasped his arm, the maniac fired again. The bullet passed through Lucy's hair. The next bullet splintered into the wood of the platform, and Mark Lane went down, trampled, beaten, and choked.

But John, eased to the floor of the platform, lay writhing with more bitter pain. To Lucy's frantic appeals he made no answer at all. He did not know what bosom pillowed his head; what white hands, striving to check the flow of his blood, were once more bedabbled with its crimson.

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XIV.

THE police have never a more distasteful or a more important task than saving red-handed criminals from the instant wrath of the public whose peace they have outraged. Rarely have policemen had a harder battle than had those few helmet-honouring heroes who saved Mark Lane from being killed by the frenzied crowd.

The doctors had no easier task in restoring John to life.

When his heavy eyelids rose at last, he found Lucy embracing and kissing him with all the old-time fervour, and an added thrill of wild fear. He looked into her eyes, breathed a faint glad "God bless you!" and swooned again. Again the doctors assailed nature with their weapons, and brought John back to consciousness, though it was a bewildered and tormented consciousness. He asked who it was that shot him.

Some one answered:

"Mark Lane."

Lucy felt a rusty knife in her heart. John shook his head sadly, and the tragedy of his love fell over him like black curtains, shutting out even the rapture of Lucy's kiss, still tingling on his lips. But he said, with a bravery that cost him no less mental than bodily hurt:

"I know — who he — is. The poor — fellow is

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— mad. He's not — to blame. It would — be a — crime to — to punish him. It is my — last command — request — that he — shall not be — put to — death; but simply — simply placed under re — restraint so that he can't — hurt any — anybody else."

Again he slipped the moorings of consciousness. When he opened his eyes again, he was in his bed; he was being mauled, pummelled, probed, and generally tortured by surgeons whose faces he remembered for their eminence. Two nurses were flitting here and there in white silence. Over in the embrasure of the window John saw Lucy, trembling like Niobe, in the embrace of her frightened children.

John waved the doctors away, and beckoned Lucy to him. She bent over, and he whispered to her:

"Lucy, — haven't I — paid the debt now?"

She laid her cheek against his, and her tears streamed across his face in answer. He said to her:

"I — I haven't long — to l-live. I'd like — to have — your love — a-again for that — little — little while."

"I love you. I love you. I love you."

The sweet reiterance rang in John's ears like a silver Sabbath bell pealing in a summer evening, and he fell a-dream smiling like a child.

The surgeons looked him over again, and said to Lucy:

"There is good excuse for hope."

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XV.

THE news of the attempt on the life of one who was generally accepted as the next President of the United States, ran around the world with instant swiftness.

The newspapers of the earth were heavy-typed with the name of this son of paupers, this scion of the lower classes. And to Lucy, the daughter of a moderately well-to-do farmer and soldier of the middle West, to this woman who had married beneath even her own humble station, the monarchs of the lands sent cablegrams of respectful sympathy, thus honouring themselves at least as much as her.

All the editors racked their brains and stirred their ink-pots to find praises enough for John Mead. The opposition papers, that had sincerely berated him at every step of his political career, found that they could sincerely declare him an honest man, a man above and beyond the confines of partisanship, a fearless man, and a man whose shrewd homely sense and democratic wit were linked to the fire of a magnificent earnestness.

Bulletins of his condition could not be issued from the sick-room fast enough to feed the anxiety of the public. They would almost have demanded that the doctors turn themselves into publishers. Thick crowds packed every space where bulletins were

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shown, and watched with personal, intimate concern every fluctuation of the Senator's pulse or fever.

The police had to rescue the two or three men among all the millions who felt impelled to repeat at this ill-chosen time criticisms of John Mead that had been printed in half the papers and thundered from half the platforms with twice the vehemence not many weeks before, in the heat of campaign. For now the very men that had hated John and his theories most, had fought against his success the hardest, and had most dreaded his elevation to the captaincy of the ship of state — these men saw for the first time how full of honour and of devout patriotism and of lovableness was this ancient enemy of theirs.

If we could only know a little better those we think we know, and know we do not like!

John's mother and his living brothers hastened from the West, and his younger brother, Richard Mead, now a successful man of affairs, postponed the wedding he had set for that very month and week.

A railroad president, Ezekiel Proudfit, who had been a boy in Darrville, a member in John's company, the "Darrville Blues," and whose family-washing Mrs. Mead had done in the far old days, offered Mrs. Mead his private car, and was proud when she accepted it.

That journey to Washington was martyrdom to the poor mother, weak with her great age, and torn with love and fear. The best she hoped was to bid John farewell before he died, and she was quite blind with tears when they helped her to his presence —

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so blind with burning tears that she could only weep and wail aloud when she heard his voice, a little feeble, but tender with loving raillery as of old:

"What you crying about, Mother? Because I wasn't at the deepo to meet you?"

The faces of the surgeons attending John grew lighter and more proud with each encouraging word they told the family. The people of the country, finding the bulletins growing almost lyrical with the rapid betterment of the Senator's condition, turned back their anxieties to their own business cares, and rejoiced as if a good friend had come out of a long illness to grasp them by the hand.

Elkanah Tew and Rosalind went all the way to Washington to see their foster-son, and their presence cheered him mightily. Elkanah, of course, found that Shakespeare had said something luminously appropriate on this as on every other subject.

Finally it seemed that all John needed was to leave the stifling air of Washington for a more tonic atmosphere.

"I'd like to go to the mountains," he said, "for there Lucy and I spent our first honeymoon. And we have another to spend now."

But it seemed best to send him to the seaside, and this thought pleased him too.

"I've never known the ocean very well," he said; "I'd like to pay it a long visit with Lucy."

So when the right day came, he was borne cautiously from the house to a carriage, and thence to a special train. Mrs. Mead went West with her other sons, and a new date was set for Richard's marriage. A little while later the schools of the

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land opened, and the children left home. The nurses were dismissed, the surgeon came only twice a day.

John and Lucy were now once more, as years and years ago, alone together in the Eden of their love. The shock and the suffering had turned John's hair as white as Lucy's, but, as with her, the snow of it seemed to give more youth and gentleness to his face. Their hearts were young and blithe, and their love revivified had the freshness, the fragrance, of the earth reawakened from the winter of remorse to the atonement of spring.

Their love seemed all the more radiant, etherealised as it was of any fleshly earthly dross. It was the love of two disembodied souls banqueting in ambrosial rapture.

And then, after the first swift march of John's health, there came a gradual halt in his spirits and his health. He seemed tired, body and soul, and he spent hours of musing upon the sea.

From his window he could follow its mystery, study its brooding personality, and its infinite improvisations of light and colour, line and movement. There seemed no monotony in the endless parade, day after day, of wave upon wave coming deliberately across the green desert, like swaying caravans of satraps from far principalities, bringing their tribute and their crowns to the feet of the monarch of earth.

"Waves are like history," John dreamed aloud, one late afternoon, as he propped himself on an elbow and stared out of the window, "and history is only waves. See that big breaker with the white,

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foam-like helmet-plumes back of him? That might be Alexander the Great coming to conquer the whole world. Now he makes his charge! See him sweep the beach as far each way as you can see. The beach is Arbela, and the billow was Alexander; but he's all worn out now, and he's crawling back to his grave.

"There's the little mound those two twins were building this afternoon. Let's call that Rome. For all I know, those twins were named Romulus and Remus."

"Their name was Jones," said Lucy, matter-of-fact-wise.

"Well, perhaps that was the last name of those two Roman waifs. Who knows? Anyway, that mound is Rome. There comes a high roller for it. Whew, see him come! He's gone up all around it. But he falls back discouraged — and the mound stays. That must have been Hannibal.

"Here's a huge one. No, the backwash is too much for him. He gets nowhere. That quiet middling wave went twice as far, for he was lucky enough not to meet much opposition. There's a third one, and he comes in on the crest just in time, and he sweeps over Rome. That was Belisarius, I guess. How much luck has to do with the great men!

"All three of those waves were equal at the start; and one got nowhere, and one got half-way, and one got all the way. That's destiny, I suppose. But the sea has withdrawn, and Belisarius, the conqueror, has to slink back to oblivion with the rest.

"There's the fiercest of them all. Hear him yell.

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He comes in like wild horses. Rome is a goner now, for sure. No, he died right at the gate. That was Attila, the Hun. I'm glad he's dead.

"But the tide is coming in fast. And soon the littlest fellows will go farther than the biggest could reach before. That's evolution. And then the tide goes out again, and evolution has to begin all over again. But look at Rome, would you. It's crumbling from beneath and within. It's only sand, after all. And — would you see! every measly little Vandal and Gothic wavelet washes over it. It will be gone in a minute. Poor old Rome!".

John fell back, like a sick child weary of the toys of fancy.

Another day at twilight finds him studying the billow armies from a new, a more personal mood.

"Remember how we used to count off our buttons: rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief? Well, that's what the sea reminds me of. It's all humanity to-day. Waves are folks: men, women, children. They come from nowhere that we can see, and we can't even guess what happens to the force that has brought them to the shore. Waves are only motion, and not water, and every drop of the sea is rocked by ripple after ripple and breaker after breaker. And people are not clay, but vibrations, waves, souls, or what-you-may-call-'ems, passing through clay. The Wherefrom and the Whereto of the wave's motion or the soul's destiny, nobody has ever made a decent guess at — let alone the Why and the How of it all.

"You know I've never been much on religion — wasn't brought up in the church. Wasn't caught

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young enough to get the habit ingrained. Time Sunday came, Mother was tired out, and she hadn't any Sunday-go-to-meetin's to wear. Most folks that I know have spent their later years unlearning, or trying to keep from analysing, the stories they had so much trouble learning at Sunday school.

"So we all come out about the same at forty or fifty. There isn't a church in the land that I could get admitted to if I had to swallow its creed. And I guess most of the church-members are glad they got in as children, before they had thought too much.

"Science is a troublesome mosquito, poking its bill in everything we wish we could believe. And yet it seems to me sometimes as if this universe ought to mean something. Perhaps it doesn't. Maybe it's like that big, stupid ocean. That seems to have a soul. It seems to be thinking great, deep thoughts, and feeling big passions. Every wave on it has its own features, its own gait, its own individuality. The ocean makes us all poets in our hearts. But horse-sense — not Pegasus-sense, but common horse-sense — tells us that the waves don't mean anything, and don't know anything, and haven't any will or any desires. Maybe, we, too — oh, it is always Maybe with us, and we go through life perhapsing and perhapsing, but never knowing. I want to Know — something, anything. I want to be Sure of something."

"You can be sure of one thing, at least," Lucy murmured.

"And what's that?"

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"That I love you!"

"God bless you!" He kissed her tenderly, and mused on.

"Lucy, you and I have never been across the ocean. There was a time when painted Indians used to lie around on these sands such evenings as this, and look out to sea. I suppose they thought, as the people across the ocean did then, that there was nothing but water, and water, and more water, to the Jumping-off Place. And yet on both sides of the ocean there were cities, and flowers, and people, and big rivers, like our dear old Mississippi, and like the Thames, and the Seine, and the Tiber, — I had so hoped to see them; and never shall.

"Look up! There's a star peeking out like a bashful girl. Do you remember how we always used to make a wish when we saw the first star? Well, I wish that on the other side of the ocean of the sky I should find a great new continent, where there'd be an eternity of exploring, and clearing, and governing, and improving. And I wish I'd find there those little dead boys of ours — oh, to see my little boys again! And there, after awhile, I'd like to send back here for you, as those old pioneers of America sent back to England, and Spain, and France, for their dearies. And I'd like finally to gather around some cosy fireplace there our whole family; even if it were a hut in a wilderness, and we had to begin all over again. . . .

"But then — when we were children, if we told our wishes aloud they didn't come true. And I've told mine!"

There was a silence, and the ocean seemed to sob

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and moan aloud with the yearning that flooded the man's ebbing soul.

Lucy could find no words. She could only cling to John's hand, and caress his brow, and look out into the night that grew around the world as moss around a gravestone.

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XVI.

THE next morning, as Lucy threw back the curtains of John's room to the inrush of the sunlight sea, and asked the sweet old phrase: "Have you slept well?" John answered with a fretted, weary shake of the head. When she kissed his forehead, it was hot and rough-knit. The food she prepared for him with her own deft hands, he turned from dismally. His medicine sickened him.

When the surgeon came, his uniform smile vanished at Lucy's news. His own examination made him solemner still. He left new prescriptions. He came again in two hours. He began to look worried; he went away, was back in an hour, and brought a nurse with him. He did not leave again, and his answers to Lucy's eager questions were evasive, contradictory, formulaic. He spoke much of "hoping for the best."

A nausea of alarm fastened on Lucy's heart.

"Why speak of 'hope' now?" she said. "It was assurance that we had before."

All day, all night, the doctor watched over John, but he grew weaker and weaker, and his heart raced faster and faster, as if it were trying to run itself to death. It was only the fever and the panic-mad heart that seemed to have strength, and theirs was the strength of wild horses stampeded near a precipice.

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All the next night Lucy kept watch and ward, and told herself that she did not fear, and quivered with terror as she said over the rote of hope. Hope, that had seemed so dear and sunny a thing in the first bitterness of the tragedy, seemed now, after weeks of the paradise of convalescence, to be a hateful, baleful guest, returning unwelcome after it had been well sped.

When morning came and found the surgeon still frustrated, Lucy forced him to summon others from New York and Philadelphia — the most eminent the telegraph and John's prestige could bring. When they arrived, they made a long study of their sinking patient, and retired for a consultation. When they reappeared, Lucy, scanning their various faces, found only varied expressions of one common hopelessness; one overshadowing meekness and helplessness upon all their learned brows. She cowered from them in wild terror, and longed for some mother-breast to flee to.

At the advice of the surgeons, she telegraphed for the children, and for Mrs. Mead. The children, interrupted in the very midst of twilight games, could not be got ready to leave their schools before the next morning. Mrs. Mead, smothered with fear, hurried to the station with only a hand-bag, and caught a train that, at its best, could reach the coast only after the second night.

The news of John's relapse flashed round the world. It brought even more sorrow than the first news of the attempted assassination. That was the shock of a dastardly attack on a great personage. This was the ache of losing one who had grown dear

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in his calamity and his brave fight for life; this was the double misery of grief recurrent after joy.

It was as when the wealthy peace of autumn is broken by the first cold black sky. The world shudders, and says, "The winter is here." Then the glaring snow withdraws, the sharp frost leaves the earth, and the Indian Summer beguiles the heart with renewal of luxury and warmth. But yet a few days, and the sky blackens again, the chill of winter returns unaware, and betrays the heart with its cold, its permanence, the hopelessness of further escape.

In this reversion all the country suffered. How far more dire the anguish of those bewildered children, and of that old mother telling off the thousand miles and more that lay between her and her beloved!

Lucy was suffocated with all of their dread, and pierced, besides, with the actual vision of John's pain, his unavailing struggle against the quicksands. He tossed and flung in his fierce wrestling with that up-creeping doom, and at length the strife left him in a delirium.

He was a little boy again, trying vainly to protect his mother, then throwing over her bruised body his own coverlet, and shivering out the night in the chill. Now he is giggling with the rapture of going to school, and he is trudging away to the brown, cackling, bantam-hen of a schoolhouse. Here he learns that education costs what he has never had, nor knows where to find — money. A little girl has asked him to study her books with her, and he scornfully reminds her that boys must sit on one side

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of the schoolroom, and girls on the other. The stubborn little girl seems to offer to give him, or then to lend him, the pennies of her own saving, for he is moaning:

"You'd never git it back, Lucy. It'd be just common stealin' for me to take it." He is flinging himself against his mother's breast, and wailing: "Mother, Mother, must we always be as poor as this? Seems as if I'd give the whole world and all the stars for money to buy those books with."

Lucy, kneeling by the bedside, is weeping bitterly at these visions of a youth that seems to have hoped and wanted and won all, only to be mocked with the final vanity.

And now the Virginia Nightingale is taunting him with its red escape; and there is the sharp-clawed, hissing wildcat between him and learning. And now with a vault of the mind across long years, he has had his schooling, and is ready for life and love; now it is his poverty that bars him from Lucy. Even under the starry, rain-sweet air, and the little shower of wet petals of roses, even when he has kissed the rose-velvet of her cheek, and she has slipped from his arms, because he has not asked the right to kiss her, he must cry out, "No, I haven't the right. I mustn't ask the right, for I am so poor. I have no home, no hope to offer her for years. I must not rob her of her youth and her beauty for my own selfish joy."

The whirling kaleidoscope of his fantasy makes strange, lurid pictures from broken bits of glass, but these fragments of his past have edges to cut Lucy's pitying heart to shreds. Most of all she

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suffers when he laughs aloud, or chuckles softly over some comic blunder he has made, or some ridiculous downfall of his hopes, — especially then, is Lucy's anguish nearest to the unendurable.

But there is no checking John's frenzy. He runs through the war in almost incoherent jumble of battle and fatigue, of garbled defeat and of pell-mell victory. Now he is suffering his first wound again — his leg gives under him, but still he coaxes his men to be steady. Suddenly he rises to his knees, and leaps to his feet in spite of the restraining hands of the nurses, the surgeons, of Lucy imploring him to spare himself. He flings them all off, and towers to the ceiling, shouting:

"General Lyon's dead; but I'll lead you! Come on, boys! To the charge! Now charge! Char-ar-arge!"

His yell was ear-splitting. In its very reverberation he fell all aheap to the bed, and lay very still, groaning with the old sting of that bullet through his cheek, of that shell that gouged his side. He is in the ambulance now, jounced along the roads of infernal pain. He is in Lexington, delirious.

After this delirium in delirium, peace comes again to him, for he whispers: "Oh, my God, I'll go mad if I think of my wounds. I must think only of Lucy Darr — only of Lucy Darr!"

Upon his whispering, sleep descended. But it was the sleep of exhaustion, the last slumber. The physicians answered Lucy's mad appeals. They plied him with restoratives. But when his reluctant soul came back through the darkness, it was only to turn

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wearily and heavy-eyed away from the hurt of the light. But still with all their art and lore, they found new means to goad the fagged-out, sleep-famished wayfarer up from the ground.

At length John turned upon them, and said:

"You're trying to keep me alive a few minutes longer. It will do no good. There is no hope. Let me alone. I'm not afraid to die."

And even Lucy, out of her deep pity for him, shook her head and waved them away when they would still have put off the inevitable surrender. And the surgeons and nurses tiptoed to a far corner, and left the two lovers to their own.

Slower and slower John's heart fluttered. Fainter and fainter and more serene — stately even — was his breathing. Round him the vast caverns of the night were opening, all patterned over with stars, and quivering with the croon of the sea.

After a long solitude in mute resignation before the passing of her lover from her arms, Lucy's eyes found John's eyes gazing up into hers, through the gloom. In the untroubled rest, he had gained strength enough for one more communion with her. He whispered, so feebly that she could hardly so much hear, as divine, his words:

"This is the last of us, my girlie. I wish I could have seen my sweet, sweet children just once more. I wish I could have kissed my poor old mother again. But I can't have everything. I have you. That's enough. You'll be brave, and live for them, I know; for you are — you. Give them these kisses for me."

She pressed her quivering lips to his, crying:

"No, no, no! You must live at least till they come.

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You must live; I can't give you up. I can't let you go. I can't, I can't, I can't!"

But he shook his head hopelessly and whispered:

"I'm sorrier for you, sweetheart, than for myself. I hate to leave you and go on alone. But they need you. And I've had more than I deserved of your love and of the sweet love-life with you. In spite of all the sorrow I have somehow caused you, Lucy, I've always, always loved you. And when I lost you, life was not worth while — not worth while at all. If I had my choice of living, as I lived for a time without you, or of winning you back again by losing my life again, I'd choose — oh, I'd always choose dying in your arms, in your love.

"I promised you when I was a boy that I'd be President of my country some day. That day will never come. And that's not the only promise I've made you — and broken. But I've paid the price. And I find it so easy to forgive the man that killed me that I — I even thank him, Lucy, for showing me what I could not, could not find out myself, how to pay my debt to you. He kept me from being the President, but he gave me back your arms to die in. So it's all right, isn't it? Everything has come out all right."

Then there was silence, save for the lonely woman wailing the sweet, simple old name, "John! John! my husband! my love!"

A distant clock tolled three with a knell-like tone, and John seemed to hear once more the chain of sentinels passing the hour round the peaceful camp, for he said, with fainter and fainter voice:

"Three o'clock, and all's well! Kiss me, little

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wife. Three o'clock, and all's well! Good-bye, Lucy, my own soul. Three o'clock — good-bye! — all's well!"

Lucy, gazing from eyes too awesome to weep more tears, looked away, as if following her lover's soul into the abysses of the infinite. She could not but feel utterly assured that John's soul was not ended here; that their life together could never be finally divorced. For the waves running along the yellow beach called out of it a great music, as they were white fingers, and the sands an olden ivory keyboard; and the reverend, ancient sky a cathedral of solemn vastitude candle-lighted with stars, a cathedral raised for a mighty purpose by a builder who could not have builded in vain, or builded but to destroy. The music, then, of the veteran sea and the old earth and of the flitting peoples thereof — what was it but one hymn of adoration and prayer, granting the glory, beseeching a glorious mercy, an untroubled happiness?

THE END.

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